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General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

4th meeting
Tuesday, 6 June 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Baali (Algeria), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Yvonne Ravales-Resida, Minister for Regional Affairs and Minister of Justice and Police of Suriname.

Mrs. Ravales-Resida (Suriname): The Government of Suriname salutes the President of the General Assembly and is pleased to see him presiding over this historic review conference. We are convinced that his leadership will guarantee us a successful outcome.

We also take great pride in participating in this gathering, since it gives us an opportunity to reflect on the manner in which Suriname has kept its promises with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

In formulating our national report on the review of this programme, we had the opportunity to evaluate our achievements, to consider the obstacles and shortcomings and to look ahead to a future course of action in order to be able to honour the commitments we made five years ago.

Due to the increased economic and financial vulnerability of our commodity-based small economy, the Government of Suriname was forced to reduce its spending, including expenditure related to the social sectors, which had a negative impact on women and children. This was compounded by new trends in international cooperation, shaped by globalization, the emergence of trade blocs, the perils of trade liberalization and the diversion of resources to only a few countries and regions. Despite these constraints, Suriname has succeeded in implementing projects in almost all the areas of the Beijing Platform for Action, including strengthening its partnership with national and international funding agencies and national non-governmental organizations, as well as the United Nations agencies, all of which have contributed to the implementation of projects for the advancement of women.

We are also participating in the Inter-American Commission of Women/Organization of American States regional action plan, as well as the regional action plans of the Caribbean Community and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and there is an agreement with the Dutch-speaking Caribbean — Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles — on gender issues.

Since 1999 our National Gender Bureau has carried out, in partnership with the United Nations

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Development Fund for Women, a programme entitled Women and Sustainable Human Development, with a view to promoting leadership, economic empowerment and human rights for women. Furthermore, the staff of the National Gender Bureau was increased, and we have made and are still making a strong and sustainable link to non-governmental organizations by establishing networks and are at present in the process of setting up a database and taking concrete steps towards gender mainstreaming.

In the field of women and leadership, we have striven to nominate women for, and place them in, leadership positions in all sectors — of course, not without some obstacles. In the previous five years we have nominated for the first time women for the positions of Speaker of Parliament, Minister of Justice and Police, Judge and Attorney-General, while the number of women in Parliament has increased.

In the field of health, the Government of Suriname has mandated a non-governmental organization to explicitly deal with the promotion and implementation of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women.

In the area of poverty eradication, various community development projects were carried out with assistance from major donors, such as the European Union, the Netherlands, the Inter-American Development Bank and various United Nations agencies, of which women and children are beneficiaries.

The Canada-Caribbean Gender Equity Fund and ECLAC also assisted us in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. With their support, gender mainstreaming within the public sector was started and has already yielded results. Due to this awareness, the Convention of Belém do Pará, on the elimination of violence against women, is only one step away from being ratified by our National Assembly, and the first report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been drafted.

Suriname is in the process of formulating its first National Gender Plan, to which Government institutions and some 100 non-governmental organizations have contributed through participation in various workshops. The methodology which has been used was based on the questionnaire of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the indicators of ECLAC. This first Gender Plan will be submitted to the Government for approval.

Furthermore, a translation into our national language of the Beijing Platform for Action has been distributed to all libraries and Government institutions, including the libraries of non-governmental organizations. Information on gender issues is becoming known through a monthly page in the local daily and in the Government *Gender Bulletin*, which is funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Suriname is implementing a programme on the decentralization and strengthening of local government in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank. We can assure the Assembly that the process of gender mainstreaming will continue with the decentralization of gender training to local districts, through public education, radio programmes in local languages, television programmes and empowerment projects for grass-roots women and men. This empowerment programme is based on the sustainable livelihood approach of the United Nations Development Programme. In this respect the Government furthermore acknowledges the important role of the private sector and of non-governmental organizations as partners in gender mainstreaming.

In our efforts to achieve gender equality, my Government holds the view that it is essential for men and women to become equal partners in the process of sustainable development, gender mainstreaming and securing peace. Gender mainstreaming should not be a process only within the public sector, but also at the level of the funding agencies and financial institutions, which can play a critical role in supporting Governments in their efforts to integrate gender concerns into policy identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In closing, my Government reaffirms its commitment to the further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and is pleased to be part of the global consensus on the future course of action for the advancement of women in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Christine Bergmann, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of Germany.

Ms. Bergmann (Germany): First of all, I would like to associate myself with the statement made by Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

The global conferences prior to Beijing had focused on equal opportunity for women and men and actively pursued its advancement. The Fourth World Conference on Women, however, was able to light a flame for the implementation of equal opportunity, a flame which continues to burn conspicuously all around the world. It is now up to us all to keep that flame alight and to prevent it from dying out or from being extinguished on purpose.

This is crucial, since the achievement of equality between women and men is an irreversible process, even when in some cases progress seems to take place at a snail's pace. Women's rights are human rights. The most recent achievement on this path has been the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Our aim must be to have that Protocol signed by all countries. Germany will be embarking on the ratification process before the end of this year.

Our equal rights policy must continue to focus firmly on our core political tasks. We must work together so that women's basic human rights are respected and observed all over the world; so that violence against women in all its forms is outlawed and eliminated; so that more women come to hold decision-making positions both in politics and in the private sector; so that the possibilities for women and men to combine family life and professional activities are improved; and so that more girls and women can decide to undertake training and pursue professions in areas which have a promising future.

Working on the implementation of these demands, which are analogous to the detailed demands comprising the Beijing Platform for Action, represents a constant challenge. It requires concrete steps towards implementation, combined with predetermined, time-bound, qualitative and quantitative requirements: time-bound targets.

That is the path we are following in Germany. Last year we decided to implement the women and work programme, which contains concrete requirements. We will be introducing legal regulations to achieve equal rights for women in public administration and in business. Another point to which we attach great importance is the need for women to be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them by the age of new information and communication technology.

We know that women will not automatically profit from the information society. That is why we are collaborating with business to achieve greater equality of opportunity in this area. We would like to increase women's presence on the Internet to 50 per cent over the next five years and the proportion of women undergoing training in information technologies and pursuing studies in the field of informatics to 40 per cent.

If we want to bring about real gender equality, men need to be more involved in family tasks and in raising children. Therefore, we have introduced a law into the legislative procedure which makes it possible for fathers and mothers to take parental leave simultaneously. During that period they are entitled to part time work of up to 30 hours per week. For two out of these three years it is possible to obtain an income-linked child-raising benefit. One year of the parental leave can be taken at a later stage until the child is eight years of age and if this is mutually agreed with the employer. All this is accompanied by a major campaign to bring about a different lead picture of fathers in society.

It was the Beijing Platform for Action that succeeded in throwing the spotlight on the problem of violence against women in all its forms and in demanding corresponding countermeasures. Violence is an issue which seriously affects women in Germany as well. With its programme of action to combat violence against women, the Federal Government presented, in December 1999, the first-ever comprehensive overall concept to combat violence. The programme of action is designed to bring about structural changes in all areas, including prevention, working with offenders, improving networks of assistance for victims, increasing awareness-building among the public and enacting legal measures, such as a law on the protection of women. For many years, discussion of the issue of violence against women has been a taboo. It is time for this to stop.

Gender mainstreaming, the strategy which emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women, constitutes one of the points of emphasis for the Federal Government in the national implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Our objective is the

integration of an equal rights policy as a permanent and continuous task in all areas of policy and in all of the Federal Government's areas of responsibility. In Germany, this process is still in its infancy, but we are pursuing it actively, because it is my firm conviction that gender mainstreaming, in the long term, is the only means of achieving a stable relationship based on equality and partnership between women and men in our society.

The enormous response which this special session of the General Assembly is generating, both in Government circles and among the non-governmental organizations, is an impressive indication of the significance which is accorded to this topic nowadays. The draft of the final document reviews the developments which have taken place over the past five years and brings a number of the demands up to date, rendering them more concrete. The political will to implement equality between men and women worldwide has been reaffirmed by the Political Declaration. It is now up to us to mobilize all of our resources to speed up the implementation process.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Magvaši, Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia.

Mr. Magvaši (Slovakia) (*spoke in Russian*): As a party, since 1993, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Slovak Republic has actively participated in the Commission on the Status of Women, including holding the vice-presidency. Yesterday, on behalf of the Government of the Slovak Republic, I signed the Optional Protocol to this Convention, which will be ratified in a few months.

With regard to the question of the situation of women, it can be said that the Fourth World Conference on Women had a positive influence in addressing women's issues. Through the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, fundamental principles for mainstreaming were established in the Slovak Republic.

In March 1996, the Coordination Committee on Women's Issues — an advisory, initiating and coordinating body of the Government, dedicated to promoting the interests and needs of women — was set up in order to safeguard the status of women institutionally. The National Action Plan for Women in Slovakia, the basic Government programme dealing with women's issues, was drawn up in 1997 on the basis of a 10-year time-frame.

As the result of an agreement between the Government of Slovakia and the United Nations Development Programme, the National Gender Centre was created in 1997 as an information, documentation and coordination body. Its main task is to establish contacts between foreign and domestic non-governmental organizations. The next step in State regulation was the establishment in 1999 of the Department of Equal Opportunities within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. Its first task will be to harmonize the Slovak legislation in the area of equal opportunities with that of the European Union and to review the anti-discriminatory nature of proposed legislative amendments.

In 1999, within the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, a parliamentary women's commission began work. It will make recommendations to Parliament with regard to equal opportunities and the overall advancement of women.

The Government of Slovakia is committed to reforming the labour law in order to achieve equal treatment for men and women in employment — in vocational training and job promotion, as well as in general working conditions. The new draft of the amendment to the Employment Act has strengthened the principle of equal treatment in employment by explicitly banning job advertisements that discriminate in respect of race, colour, language, gender, social origin, age, religion, political or other thinking, political adherence, trade union activity, membership in a national or ethnic group or any other status. Changes to the labour law have provided for equal treatment for women in the workforce.

The Government of Slovakia is guaranteeing the right of parents to make their own choices with regard to the compatibility of their parental and professional roles by making it possible for them to work part time. Beginning this year, a family and job audit will be carried out annually, on the basis of which awards will be granted to employers who create optimum working conditions, thereby supporting family harmony and improving the working lives of their employees.

It is necessary to emphasize the different situations of women and men in the labour market. Economic necessity means that there are a large number of women in employment. This makes women

feel more independent. In considering this question, it is necessary to compare three principles: equal pay for equal work, equal pay for work of equal value, and equal job opportunities, irrespective of gender.

The situation of women in public life and their involvement in managerial functions represent an area in which hidden discriminatory tendencies against women and inequality between women and men can be seen most clearly. The increased participation of women in managing society and in public administration, either directly or by freely selecting their representatives, is thus a strategic aim of women.

Slovakia supports United Nations activities that are creating a new, equal partnership between women and men. Our Government intends to pursue further policies to promote equality and equal opportunities for women and men by adopting measures that will implement, as broadly as possible, the conclusions of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Páll Pétursson, Minister for Social Affairs of Iceland.

Mr. Pétursson (Iceland): It is a pleasure to participate in this special session and to follow the cooperation taking place to improve the status of the world's women and girls for the purpose of achieving gender equality. It is important for us, the Member States, to make full use of the tremendous human resources which are currently being wasted as a result of the fact that women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. Thus, it is important for women to be able to participate actively in politics and in any kind of decision making. It is also important for women and men, girls and boys, to have equal access to education. It is worth mentioning that in Iceland the number of women attending university exceeds that of men.

While the Icelandic Government has made efforts to equalize the status of women and men throughout society, many are of the opinion that this development has been too slow. This is despite of the fact that the legal status of women in Iceland is one of the best in the world. We have achieved considerable progress since Beijing. It should be noted that women's representation in the Althing, the Icelandic parliament, has reached 36.5 per cent, a 10 per cent increase since Beijing in 1995.

With increased participation of women in the labour market, attitudes have changed regarding the roles played by women and men in society. More than 80 per cent of Icelandic women work outside the home. For this reason, it is increasingly demanded that mothers and fathers be offered equal opportunities to be active both within the family and in the labour market. One factor that can facilitate the coordination of family life and paid work is granting parents equal rights to maternity/paternity leave and parental leave. Legislation to this effect was passed by the Icelandic parliament this spring.

It will be interesting to observe the effects of this legislation on gender equality, as fathers will now have an independent right to a three-month paternity leave. This right is not transferable. Additionally, parents are entitled to three months paid joint leave which they can divide between themselves. The parent in question is to receive 80 per cent of his or her total wages and is not to lose job-related benefits. Furthermore, each parent is independently entitled to a 13-week parental leave.

The aim of the law is to ensure that every child is taken care of by both of its parents, and also to enable women and men to coordinate family life and paid work. Its purpose is, not the least, to encourage men to fulfil their obligations towards their children and family, on an equal basis with women. At the same time, efforts are being made to facilitate the participation of women in the labour market and make it possible for them to be on an equal footing with men. We hope this legislation will eliminate the wage difference existing between men and women, a difference that can be explained only on the basis of gender. Research has shown that women's traditional caretaking role has reduced their chances on the labour market.

New legislation on gender equality was passed this spring in Iceland, providing for equal status for men and women in every respect. Even though direct legislation in this field is considered to have limited effect if it does not have the moral support of society, it is nevertheless necessary. In order for men and women to have equal opportunities to strengthen and develop their abilities and enjoy a healthy and happy life, attitude is of crucial importance.

Trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation has received increased attention in recent years. Trafficking in women is of special concern. As this constitutes an internationally organized crime, it is essential for the world community to join hands in fighting this violation of human rights. The Icelandic Government has initiated legislation on preventive measures.

Domestic violence and other gender-related violence, is a worldwide problem. It is important for each and every country to seek ways to prevent such acts of violence and punish those responsible.

Women are subjected to injustice and discrimination worldwide in spite of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This applies to both men and women. Human rights are universal, and the disguise of religion and tradition can never be accepted as an excuse for tolerating human rights violations.

Serious human rights violations against women continue. The Secretary-General said at the opening of the special session that we had made considerable progress now that violence has been made illegal in most countries. The Icelandic Government feels that violence against women should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

For these reasons it is important for Member States to agree on actions which will improve the living conditions of men and women as we enter the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency the Honourable Portia Simpson-Miller, Minister of Tourism and Sport, with responsibility for women's affairs, of Jamaica.

Ms. Simpson-Miller (Jamaica): I begin with a line from international reggae superstar and Jamaican folk hero Bob Marley — "No Woman, No Cry". This song of reassurance, encouraging women to dry their tears, finds resonance in the hearts of Jamaican women and women around the globe who feel the effects of inequality and injustice in their daily lives. To them, gender justice is not an abstract issue for discussion in the international corridors of power, but a practical end that must be achieved. The women of the world have been meeting since 1975. Twenty-five years and four world conferences later we are still discussing much of what we should have already implemented.

This is not to deny that significant progress has been achieved by State intervention and by non-governmental organizations in a number of critical areas. I therefore come before this great body, bearing a strong message of urgency and a feeling of hope from my country that the day will come when gender equality, development and peace are realized in the world.

This urgency is based on the recognition that while the world is changing rapidly, developing countries are neither able to keep pace with the changes, nor to tackle the backlog of economic injustice and social inequalities.

We still have many of the old challenges to face, but there are newer and more stubborn challenges. Over the past decade, the countries of the South have been feeling some of the adverse effects of advancing globalization, financial crises, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the expansion of the drug culture, the seemingly never-ending armed conflicts and natural disasters. These are some of the factors that have had a negative impact on the ability of developing countries to pursue economic policies capable of generating resources for sustainable livelihoods for the majority of our people. This point is important because gender justice is impossible without economic justice and because, conversely, there can be no real economic justice until gender justice is realized.

Our task now is to remain focused on consolidating the gains that women and girls have made. We must continue to be vigilant and become even more conscious of the danger that women's issues may fall off the page altogether or be placed in a secondary position when the priorities of economic and social development are being determined. The imperative of ensuring that women have a larger voice in the decision-making process is more urgent now than ever before.

One area of particular interest that we would like to see emphasized in the outcome of this special session is the situation concerning adolescent girls. In many countries, girls are often the victims of various forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. We have no choice but to pay special attention to reproductive health issues and to the rights of adolescents. The approach must be holistic because a whole network of

related issues is involved, linking education, poverty eradication and gender-based violence.

Another area of challenge is the upsurge in violence against women. Effective interventions that will have lasting impact on the elimination of all forms of violence against women are urgently required.

As we contemplate the future, we are constrained to take into account the effects of globalization on our hopes for sustainable human development and on the achievement of gender equity. While acknowledging that globalization does offer opportunities for advancement to those who are equipped to exploit them, we must be ever mindful of the serious threat it is posing to women and other vulnerable groups. The competition between large-scale and small-scale economies in the global market place is particularly threatening to the women who make their livelihoods in the agricultural and service sectors. Within the international community, we must therefore address the economic, social and political contradictions in the application of global strategies.

These strategies, if not properly and sensitively planned, will make the poorest and most marginalized women, men and children poorer and poorer and even more marginalized. Governments and multilateral and bilateral programmes of assistance must, therefore, address the eradication of poverty, as well as the plight of women and children.

The women of my country send this Assembly an urgent message: Let us make sure that our work here is effective in removing the remaining systemic barriers and traditional practices that keep significant numbers of women out of decision-making; out of economic growth; out of the health systems; and out of the total development process in our countries.

I make two appeals to this Assembly: first, that when the heads of State and Government gather here in September for the Millennium Summit, women's issues be placed squarely on their agenda and given priority in their discussions; and secondly, that Governments move from commitment to action and aggressively implement the recommendations in the Beijing Platform for Action. Only then will we be able confidently to say with Bob Marley: "No woman, no cry ... everything is gonna be alright".

Women of the world, let us more forward in confidence, because our cause is not only just, it is also politically possible, economically feasible and morally necessary.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Ms. Daphne Phillips, Minister of Culture and Gender Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ms. Phillips (Trinidad and Tobago): It is an honour to address this special session of the General Assembly convened to assess the progress achieved since the adoption in 1995 of the Beijing Platform for Action and to consider further actions and initiatives to ensure that men and women alike enjoy equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Recent data show that, although women have made gains in certain areas, disparities persist between men and women in several spheres and that, in some countries, the situation of women has deteriorated. The challenge to fully implement the Platform for Action is aggravated in some countries by such factors as the negative impact of globalization and the lack of human and financial resources.

In spite of the constraints, the countries of the Caribbean region are earnestly attempting to implement the commitments made in Beijing and have developed a Regional Platform of Action. In this respect, at the Third Caribbean Ministerial Conference on Women held in Trinidad and Tobago from 5 to7 October 1999, the Port-of-Spain Consensus was adopted and has been circulated as a document of this special session.

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has pledged to implement and take action on the 12 critical areas of concern articulated in the Beijing Platform for Action, on some of which I will now report.

In the area of women and poverty, a situational analysis of women in 1997 indicated that poverty is more widespread among female-headed households. Women also occupy the lowest paying, traditionally female-dominated fields of work. Conscious of the important place of women in the development of our twin island Republic, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has sought to address the issue of women and poverty through an integrated and multi-faceted approach.

The Small Business Development Company (SBDC), a government body, is the main vehicle used by Government to stimulate the micro- and small-enterprise sector. Forty-three per cent of SBDC loan

guarantees are awarded to women, 90 per cent of training recipients are women and 80 per cent of participants of the community venture programme are women, primarily rural women.

Fund Aid, a private funding institution supported by the Government, provides loans to poor persons with limited collateral to develop micro-enterprises. Sixty per cent of Fund Aid clients are women.

The Government piloted and established a Women's Leadership Enhancement Institute in 1998 and 1999, respectively. This programme seeks to enhance the capacity of women to develop sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families through creative and pertinent training. The Institute also conducts training for women in leadership, business, skills enhancement and political participation.

The Export Centre Programmes, which especially target female-headed households, refine the skills of community-based artisans and direct their fine crafts to the export market. A National Poverty Eradication Programme is being implemented by the Social Equity Council, established in 1997. This Council, which reflects the participatory approach to dealing with poverty, is chaired by an independent woman Senator and includes the active participation of non-governmental organizations and the business community.

A Cabinet-appointed task force was convened to review the educational curriculum for primary and secondary schools to address gender disparities in education which go beyond the issue of access. The work of the task force includes the development of a gender-sensitive curriculum in focus and in practice to ensure the full and equitable development of, and participation by, both boys and girls.

Measures were also implemented to improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education. These measures included two Government-piloted projects, training women in non-traditional areas such as masonry, plumbing, technical drawing, blueprint reading, construction, carpentry and electrical installation. In addition, in 1998 a Technical Agreement was signed with the Inter-American Development Bank to conduct a regional non-traditional programme for women.

Government initiatives to facilitate the productive employment and creation of sustainable livelihoods include the Women's Second Chances Programme, the Adult Education Programme and the Unemployment Relief Women's Training Programme.

In a bid to foster the strengthening of women's economic rights and remove discrimination against women, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago spearheaded several initiatives. In 1998 the Minimum Wage Law was enacted, ensuring that no category of worker was paid less than $7 per hour, and in 1998 the Maternity Protection Act guaranteed maternity leave with pay for a period of 13 weeks to all employed women.

The counting of unremunerated work and the mechanism for quantifying and recording the monetary value of such work was agreed to by the Government and implemented in the 2000 census. Trinidad and Tobago was one of the first countries to enact legislation to this effect: the Counting Unremunerated Work Act of 1996.

In Trinidad and Tobago in 1999 the Domestic Violence Act of 1991 was rewritten to equip the criminal justice system to respond more competently to domestic violence issues. Amendments to the 1986 Sexual Offences Act have recently been laid before Parliament to strengthen that law, and legislation related to sexual harassment is in the preparatory stages.

A Domestic Violence Unit was established in 1997 as part of the Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs. The Unit engages in extensive educational programmes in several schools and communities to engineer a change in the socialization processes which foster gender-based violence.

To further the work of the Unit, 23 information/drop-in centres have been established throughout the country, offering counselling services to victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault or family conflict. A 24-four hour National Domestic Violence Hotline has been in operation since 1996. This allows victims a toll-free listening, counselling and reference service to police and shelters.

In an effort to ensure an integrated approach to the issue of violence against women, the Domestic Violence Unit operates training programmes for persons who interface with victims of gender-based violence on a regular basis. Police officers, hotline

listeners, social workers, shelter and safe-house managers and other interested persons are involved in training programmes on a regular basis. A structured and ongoing four-module programme is also being implemented, as well as a programme for pre-secondary-school students.

Trinidad and Tobago, in the promotion of gender equality, encountered several constraints. These include deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and practices, the impact of globalization, structural and institutional obstacles and lack of adequate financial and human resources.

It is our responsibility at this special session to identify, from the experiences enunciated, the remaining challenges to achieve further advancement of women and adopt relevant strategies for action. In order to realize the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and to implement further initiatives, there is also a need to build partnerships both within and between countries, and to ensure that adequate human and financial resources are available, so that no individuals, especially women and girls, are marginalized or made vulnerable in a world in which we face new challenges through such forces as globalization.

These are some of the areas being addressed by Trinidad and Tobago. A fuller and more comprehensive report is being circulated.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Hamilton Lashley, Minister of Social Transformation of Barbados.

Mr. Lashley (Barbados): In the five short years since Beijing, we have been witnesses to and active participants in a new world order in which multilateral and global-centred relations and interests predominate and reshape the fortunes and destinies of our nations.

In this new power-based, technology-driven, international trading system, globalization and liberalization have become the most fundamental challenges confronting all nations. Their effects on the smallest, most vulnerable and least able to adapt, such as the small island developing States, are far-reaching. Barbados and other developing nations confront a myriad of challenges, which threaten to confine our citizens, in particular our women and children, to remaining a vulnerable group.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to assess the progress made in achieving greater gender equality, consolidate gains, and identify and focus our efforts on areas which continue to be of greatest concern. Barbados, as a small island developing State, has been equally affected by these global changes, and consequently has remained committed to the goals of Beijing, which identify strategies to improve the condition of women globally.

We have focused on five areas for priority action: institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in all areas of development; women in poverty; violence against women; women in decision-making; and women and health, especially reproductive and sexual health.

The Ministry of Social Transformation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, non-governmental organizations and civil society, now carries out the work in these areas. Mindful of the pivotal role which women play in the social and economic development of society, the Ministry of Social Transformation combines women's affairs with social services, child care, community development, national assistance, care of the elderly, urban development, the national disability unit and the Poverty Bureau. This new Ministry also seeks to rationalize the existing social service agencies and to implement the priority strategies listed in the Beijing Platform for Action.

A positive initiative of this new Ministry has been the introduction of gender mainstreaming. To this end, the national machinery for women is being strengthened. A number of focal points have been established across ministries and departments to facilitate the gender management system.

Globally, violence against women has been identified as a priority area for action. Throughout the 1990s this issue has galvanized Government and non-governmental action in the Caribbean. This heightened activity in the area of violence against women surfaced in 1992, when the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women formally defined gender-based violence as a manifestation of gender-based discrimination.

The recognition that violence against women is a phenomenon which is devastating to the development of a stable society has led to the establishment of mechanisms to tackle the problem in Barbados.

Legislation against domestic violence has been enacted, and a shelter for battered women has been provided by the Government and is managed by leaders of civil society. Legal aid is provided to victims, and the family services department of the Ministry provides counselling for families. There has also been public education in relation to domestic violence and the legal provisions which exist to manage and prevent it. Training programmes have been established for our police officers and personnel in the crisis centres, and a joint civilian/police victim support programme has been instituted.

It has been globally established that the bulk of poverty in developing countries is among women, possibly 70 per cent. In Barbados and the Caribbean, these women are often single heads of households and are therefore the principal, if not sole, breadwinners for families. Any conscious effort to eliminate poverty must therefore be an attempt to ameliorate the economic and social conditions of women. Consequently, in Barbados the alleviation of poverty has been identified as a priority area for action in advancing the status of women. While the chronic poor are not confined to women and include other vulnerable groups, there are issues related to gender which are structurally linked to poverty. The Government of Barbados has established a poverty eradication fund and has embarked on a series of measures to boost entrepreneurial activities that increase self-employment and create more employment among the unemployed youth and women. Barbados has also established a Social Investment Fund, which currently provides loans for poor, disadvantaged persons with a view to developing small business entrepreneurship. The Barbados Government has undertaken this programme in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme.

It has been established that good health is one of the ingredients inherent in the attainment of sustainable development. Given the fundamental role which women play in development, women's health status must be a factor for any society's growth. Barbados holds as its philosophy that the right to health care is a fundamental human right. Therefore, it maintains a health-care system of high quality with free health care for all. Government also makes provisions for maternal health care, a free drug service for children, the elderly and the chronically ill and a family planning service.

With respect to sexually transmitted diseases, worldwide it has been noted that increasingly the HIV/AIDS disease is one which affects poor women. The World Health Organization statistics show that the Caribbean region has the second highest adult prevalence globally. An alarming 33 per cent of HIV-positive adults are women. Barbados has participated in regional programmes, assisted by United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women, in community-based research on the socio-economic factors that make women vulnerable to AIDS, as well as in advisory programmes aimed at AIDS education and prevention.

Recognizing that HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases pose significant problems for women and girls and place an added burden on women as health-care providers for the family, Government has moved to introduce a gender perspective in the delivery of health services.

In tackling the problem of HIV/AIDS, Barbados has instituted the formation of a National AIDS Committee. It is a concrete expression of the national will to confront the complex problems associated with the HIV pandemic. Through the Committee, public awareness programmes have been instituted and the public has been sensitized and educated in AIDS prevention programmes.

With regard to women in decision-making, in Barbados there are no restrictions on women's participation in public and political life. Our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade is a woman. The Minister of Education and the Central Bank Governor are also women. Even with these significant and symbolic achievements, women in political office constitute a small minority, since women still tend not to stand for elective office. Barbados hopes to ameliorate this situation through education and training. Indeed, through a gradual process our women are rising to prominent leadership roles in all sectors.

Barbados supports the view that men must involve themselves in all areas of society and must take joint responsibility with women for the promotion of gender equality and promote social integration. To this end, Government is promoting a number of programmes to foster gender awareness and sensitivity.

In the midst of a global environment that is hostile for small island developing States, Barbados

has struggled to meet the challenges of globalization and has maintained its development goals even in the most trying economic times. One of the negative consequences of globalization and structural adjustment programmes has been the feminization of poverty. Barbados therefore joins those who call for the reform of the international financial institutions, and we continue to insist on an increase in and further improvement of financial and technical assistance that targets human and social development in small States and in developing nations. Measures like these will help achieve some success for our poverty eradication programmes aimed at women, children and men.

The various United Nations conferences on social and economic development, which took place half a decade ago, have not produced all the results we longed for and to which we committed ourselves at Copenhagen and Beijing. Let us hope that this review of Beijing will prick the conscience of the whole world to achieve the betterment of humankind. I must remind the Assembly, on behalf of our delegation from Barbados, that we must let no obstacle be greater than the cause.

The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kotbi Al-Mahdi, Minister of Social Planning of the Sudan.

Mr. Al-Mahdi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): God says in the Koran:

> "O people! be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same kind and spread from these two many men and women; and be careful of your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand one of another your rights, and to the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you". (*The Holy Koran, IV:1*)

I wish at the outset to congratulate the President and the other Assembly officers on the occasion of this special session on the theme of "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We are extremely grateful to the Secretariat for its efforts regarding the advancement of women.

It has been five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held at Beijing. We reaffirm my Government's commitment to the goals identified at that conference: to achieve the advancement of women and to improve their status at all levels. We are further committed to implementing the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. This session provides an opportunity to review the implementation of the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, not to reverse or revise the consensus text that it represents.

I wish to speak briefly about achievements for women and by women in my country, and about the obstacles we face in attaining the goals before us. The Government of the Sudan attaches special importance to the women's sector and to integrating it with other sectors. Immediately following the Beijing Conference, my Government formed a high-level committee chaired by the Minister of Social Planning, and with the participation of both official and voluntary bodies, to follow up the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. In that connection the Sudan has reaffirmed that education, health, peace, the stability of family and society, fighting poverty and promoting development are priority areas.

Sudanese women have held high positions in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the Government; their rights and duties have been protected by a series of laws and by successive post-independence constitutions. They have all the rights enjoyed by men. Article 21 of the 1998 Sudanese constitution stipulates that all are equal before the law, and that all Sudanese share equal rights and duties as well as the right to hold public office. It stipulates that there can be no discrimination based on race, sex or religion, and that all are equal in their ability to qualify for public jobs and public responsibilities.

Since independence, women have been direct participants in our political life; they attained the right to run for office and to vote in 1965. Since 1969 women have held ministerial positions; recently, a woman was appointed as an adviser to the President of the Republic on women's and children's affairs. A number of women have been appointed as Supreme Court judges, as ambassadors and as governors. Women are in charge of many media entities, such as the official Sudanese news agency.

The Government has set up many institutional mechanisms to improve the status of women, in addition to civil-society organizations that are helping implement our national plan for the advancement of women. There has been a marked improvement in the status of women in terms of general education.

Statistics indicate that the rate of admission of women to preparatory education has risen from 60 per cent in 1995 to 69 per cent at the end of 1999.

In the Sudan, there have been great advances in higher education. Between 1989 and 1999 there has been great progress also in secondary education. According to a 1997 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on education in Africa, Sudan ranks fourth on the "A" list of the top 10 African States in terms of quality of higher education. The State has devoted great attention to public and private institutions of higher learning to prepare them to face the challenges of the twenty-first century and to take advantages of new opportunities. The most recent phase of our plan, since 1995, has focused on education in high technology as a key element of development. Statistics for higher education between 1995 and 1999 indicate an increased rate of admission of women to the various institutions of higher learning, with their number standing at 24,012: 62 per cent, compared with 47.3 per cent for the 1995-1996 academic year.

Moreover, the Sudan has been waging a campaign to eliminate illiteracy, which has resulted in a decline in illiteracy of females from the 83 per cent shown in the 1993 census to 57.6 per cent today. The Sudan was one of the first States to implement the recommendations of the Jamathin conference and other conferences on education policies.

In the Sudan there have also been advances in family planning, in combating harmful practices and in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases in our society. There are several programmes for the training of health-care workers.

The Sudan has established many programmes to encourage the participation of women in the process of peace, in which women are now playing a major role, as reflected in the Maastricht declaration adopted at a symposium on Sudanese women and peace. That role is reflected in the contribution of Sudanese women to the peace process in the war-torn states of southern Sudan, which are particularly affected by the ongoing conflict. They are involved in decision-making, the settlement of disputes and disseminating a culture of peace. Special attention is devoted to women and girls who are victims of the ongoing armed conflict.

My country continues to implement programmes for integrated and sustainable development. But like every other developing and least developed country, the Sudan still faces many obstacles to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, including the decline in official development assistance and the fact that developed countries have not met their commitment to devote 0.7 per cent of gross national product to assistance to developing countries. We regret that this continues five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in spite of an international agreement to meet that objective. The debt burden continues to weigh heavily upon these countries. Economic sanctions and unilateral coercive measures by some States are other factors that have impeded our national development effort.

Let me reiterate what we have said in many other forums: implementation of commitments under international agreements must take place in the framework of full respect for the sovereignty of States and for the specific national, political, economic, cultural, religious and historical characteristics of every society. I note that we are living in an age of many conflicts and wars that are being used by some to achieve their own political and economic agendas; it is women, children and families that suffer.

We therefore call for an affirmation of noble human values, in order to limit negative social phenomena that diminish the dignity of women and that exploit them commercially. We appeal for a return to the traditional family as prescribed by all divine values, and to a good society in which women play their natural role: that of bringing new generations into the world for the sake of a better future.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency, Ms. Noëline Jaotody, Minister for Population, the Advancement of Women and Children of Madagascar.

Ms. Jaotody (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): I should like to pay tribute to the Assembly on behalf of the Government and the people of Madagascar, a country which I, together with the other members of our delegation, have the honour of representing at this session.

I should also like to express our warmest thanks to the entire United Nations system, in particular to the Secretary-General, the Commission on the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session and to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee. Thanks to their efforts, we are

holding the twenty-third special session, which has brought us together today, both Member States and observers.

Twenty-five years have passed since the first World Conference of the International Women's Year — 25 years during which the various United Nations women's conferences have caused a growing number of men and women to become active partners of the world programme of action for gender equality. They have stimulated research, strengthened advocacy activity and encouraged the adoption of policies for the advancement of women. They have created greater awareness of the gender-specific dimensions of equality, development and peace.

The working documents produced by the Commission on the Status of Women, including summaries of the reports of Member States in their various regional, international and national groupings, have served as the basis for discussion in the various working groups. Such groupings include the Group of 77 and China, the European Union and the JUSCANZ group of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the United States.

The major new approach is the integration of a strategy aimed at including the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men in the creation, implementation, monitoring and evolution of policies and programmes in all areas — political, economic and social — so that women and men may benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

Such was the approach strategy of the Beijing Platform for Action. What has my country done? Forty years of independence have elapsed — 40 years in which careful progress towards equality between the sexes has made its presence felt in all the constitutions of the Republic of Madagascar, and continues to do so today. This has been highlighted by the institution of a humanistic and ecologically based Republic in which men and women, equal partners in development, are artisans of development for the mastery of nature and the fulfilment of humankind.

The fight against poverty and the establishment of good governance have guided the various successive Governments of Madagascar, with special emphasis placed on actions to benefit vulnerable groups, including women and children. This has been achieved thanks to the allocation of more than 20 per cent of the domestic budget to the areas of education and health. The national health policy — in particular, risk-free motherhood — has led to a reduction of the mortality rate of both mothers and children. The rate of access to health care will increase from 50 per cent in 2000 to 90 per cent in 2015.

In the area of education, after Beijing the national action plan for the education of girls was established in October 1995, inspired to a great extent by the recommendations of the Forum for African Women Educationalists, of which Madagascar is a member. Thus, there has been a net improvement in the level of schooling for girls, which is now at 77 per cent, as compared with 74.5 per cent for boys. In this context, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to support the priorities defined by the Secretary-General in his millennium report, document A/54/2000, particularly with respect to the access of girls, on an equal footing with boys, to all educational levels from now until the year 2015.

The Government of Madagascar's attainment of the objective of a growth rate of 4.8 per cent has enabled the per capita income to increase. This positive trend is reflected, among other developments, in a great increase in skilled labour in tax-free zone enterprises, 90 per cent of which are owned by women, and in micro-financing policies that are accessible to women, such as mutual savings and credit.

With regard to the effective participation of women in decision-making, the process of establishing the self-governing provinces in Madagascar has furthered locally based management practices, resulting in a great number of women entering local government as mayors and municipal councillors, while in the judiciary, 50 per cent of the judges are women and 75 per cent of decision-making posts are held by women.

In the area of the economy and finance, high-level posts such as the Director General of the Treasury and the Director of the Public Investment Project are held by women. Furthermore, a general mobilization of public and private enterprises has been undertaken by my department since the Beijing Conference in order to enhance the legal status of women. Hence, very soon we will be adopting a law against violence against women. In this context, Madagascar welcomes the adoption of resolution 54/134, by which the General Assembly decided to designate 25 November as the

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Five years have elapsed since the Government of Madagascar adopted the Beijing Declaration and Programme for Action and established a follow-up mechanism for the Programme for Action within the Ministry of Population, the Advancement of Women and Children, which I have the honour to head. They have been five years of concerted activity between the various development partners, such as non-governmental organizations, associations, groups, international organizations and civil society, that have been moving towards equality between men and women. This political will has been achieved by, on the one hand, a huge reform programme in the public sector in various areas and, on the other, the establishment and implementation of policies, strategies and programmes in the area of development.

I should like to mention in particular the national strategy to combat poverty and the first national population programme. The national strategy to combat poverty defines a strategic framework for action to fight generalized poverty. The national population programme, adopted in 1997, is contributing to this struggle by including in its objectives and strategies the various recommendations of the different international conferences, in particular the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development and the Beijing Conference on Women. The main strategy of the population programme is to take into account the variables of population and gender discrimination.

Madagascar has rediscovered the road towards economic growth. Our achievements in this area in 1997, especially with regard to inflation, established a sound basis for progress towards development.

An improved distribution of the fruits of this growth is one of the priorities of the Government for the coming years. Thus, the duty and responsibility of each entity, whether public or private, is to continue improving the recovery programme in order to create an environment that will favour the promotion of women and sustainable human development.

To conclude, the delegation of Madagascar expresses the hope that these discussions will be guided by our shared determination to carry out concerted and specific measures that will help us face the challenges of this new millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on Her Excellency Mrs. Mintata Mint Hedeid, Secretary of State for the Status of Women of Mauritania.

Mrs. Hedeid (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me first and foremost to express my pleasure at seeing Mr. Gurirab preside over this special session of the General Assembly devoted to evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action. I am convinced that, thanks to his high moral and intellectual qualities, this session will be successful.

This special session provides us with the opportunity to take stock of what has been done since Beijing, to pinpoint the obstacles encountered and to adopt new measures and initiatives in order to overcome them.

In this context, my country has pursued and consolidated economic, social and political reforms, which have been taking place since the middle of the eighties. The establishment of pluralistic democracy has led to profound changes, both at the level of the legal and institutional environment and at the economic, social and cultural level.

These changes have enabled us to restore major macroeconomic balances, to create the conditions for sustainable growth and to set up a coherent strategy to fight poverty and to encourage grass-roots development. This strategy has allowed us to reduce poverty and to improve significantly people's access to basic social services, such as education, health, drinking water and food.

The overall percentage of children in full-time education went from 46 per cent in 1990 to 90 per cent in 1999. The figures for girls improved in particular, going from 40 per cent in 1990 to 84 per cent in 1999.

The improvement of the various economic and social indicators has led to a considerable drop in poverty. These significant results testify to the efforts made by Mauritania in matters of social development. Indeed, the resources allocated to the social sectors reached almost 37 per cent of public expenditure for the period 1990-1998, which is approximately twice the level recommended by the Copenhagen Summit.

This positive outcome was welcomed by our partners in development and has shown our country to be one of the first to benefit from the initiative in favour of the most heavily indebted countries.

Mauritania, the first African country to have a policy relating to the allocation of debt relief resources to the reduction of poverty, adopted last November a strategy to fight against poverty in order to bring the numbers of the poor down to 12 per cent of the population by the year 2015, to make primary education and basic health care widespread by 2002 and to eliminate all gender and regional inequalities.

With respect to the advancement of women, the governmental policy has consisted of increasing full-time education for girls, favouring women's education, promoting their effective participation in public affairs and encouraging women's access to economic resources through the emergence of local microfinancing institutions.

The Government's will in this area has been reflected in the elaboration and adoption of a national strategy for women's advancement, supported by a declaration on population policy. This strategy provides a framework that establishes the Government's choices with respect to women's advancement, bearing in mind the recommendations of the Beijing Conference.

The implementation of this strategy has made it possible to reduce gender inequalities and to fight poverty in rural and urban areas by means of the continuing increase in the percentage of girls in the education system; the financing of small projects benefiting women; the promotion of savings and access to loans; the creation of job opportunities; the improvement of women's capacities in the areas of management, production, and support for small businesses managed by women, whose activities are aimed at improving the living conditions of the population in general, and of women in particular; attaching particular importance to professional, technical and academic education for women; and vaccination campaigns for mothers and children.

Also, thanks to this new direction, Mauritanian women have entered Government, Parliament and the municipal councils as well as senior decision-making posts in the civil service and the private sector.

We now have more than 2,000 cooperatives and women's associations operating in the areas of promotion of the family, arts and crafts, agriculture, trade and tourism. This movement of associations that work for the advancement of women, their legal protection and the improvement of their economic and social conditions receives the support of my department. This partnership has allowed for considerable progress in such important areas as microfinancing, saving and loans.

My Government's efforts are currently geared towards the consolidation of all these achievements and the coordination of policies and programmes relating to the advancement of women. Particular attention is given to education, training and income-generating activities, as well as the introduction of the gender approach in all development policies.

The main axes of the family policy and a national strategy on behalf of small children are being developed in conformity with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also testifies to my country's adherence to the values of human rights and, most particularly, women's fundamental rights.

The implementation of the priorities established by the Government and the recommendations of Beijing was supported by activities of public awareness and social mobilization. My department drew up a plan to use all the channels and materials of information, education and communication to combat any ideas and social impediments that could hinder the effective participation of women in social and economic development. These efforts have allowed the establishment of a foundation conducive to the advancement of women, their economic independence and the strengthening of their social and political position as actors in development.

The climate of freedom, democracy and security in my country has been a determining factor for the success of social development programmes in general and for those relating to the advancement of women in particular. Carried out in close consultation with partners in development and civil society, these programmes have been based primarily on fighting poverty; women and decision-making; and support for the associations.

These are the main achievements that my country has made since the Beijing Conference. They demonstrate the interest that my Government places in the advancement of women, which is limited solely by constraints linked to our level of development.

This special session, being held at the dawn of a new millennium and devoted to the situation of the half of humanity that has long been relegated to second place, should make a difference by helping to secure adequate resources for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been impacted by the decline in official development assistance and by reduced resources. In so doing, this session will have contributed to establishing the bases of a more equitable world in greater solidarity, one that guarantees to all its daughters and sons equality, development and peace.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Kamala Pant, Minister of State for Women, Children and Social Welfare of Nepal.

Ms. Pant (Nepal): I join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Gurirab for assuming the presidency of this important session. I am confident that his able leadership will guide the session to its fruitful conclusion, towards which my delegation extends its full cooperation.

As one of the participating countries in the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, Nepal, along with the rest of the world community, expressed full commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Conference. Immediately after the Beijing Conference, a separate Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare was established in Nepal, which then formulated a National Plan of Action on the 12 critical areas of concern. The current Ninth Five-Year Plan of Nepal takes full cognizance of the National Plan of Action. The main policies of the Plan for women are gender mainstreaming in all developmental activities, reduction of gender disparities and empowerment of women. These have been the guiding policies for all our programmes, including the recently launched nationwide programme for political, social and economic empowerment of women at the grass roots level, which will cover all villages of Nepal within five years.

A recent national review, a full report of which is being made available, shows that there have been some improvements towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Nepal, but that progress has been slow and much remains to be achieved. There have been various other initiatives after Beijing, but their effective implementation has been constrained mainly by frequent changes of Governments, especially between 1995 and 1999, the traditional patriarchal society of Nepal, and resource constraints. Despite some recent achievements in increasing women's access to education and health services, the overall educational and health status of Nepalese women remains unsatisfactory. Some laws that are discriminatory to women still exist, although a civil code amendment bill has already been submitted to Parliament. Ensuring respect for the human rights of women and violence against women — especially trafficking, dowry-related and domestic — are significant problems. Women's participation in the economy is still mostly in traditional and less productive sectors and their true contributions to the national economy are yet to be fully accounted for.

The Local Self-Governance Act 1999 ensures 20 per cent representation by women among elected members of local bodies. This provision has made it possible for about 40,000 women to participate in these bodies. Representation of women in Parliament has also increased over the years. However, their representation in key decision-making political positions and in the civil service is still very low.

Nepal will be investing increasingly in the social sector to improve the living conditions of people in general and women in particular. In 1995, about 30 per cent of the total national budget was allocated to the social sector, which has increased to over 35 per cent of the budget this year.

The recent establishment of a Human Rights Commission will play an important role in protecting and improving the human rights situation of women. Similarly, the soon-to-be-established National Commission on Women is expected to improve the effectiveness of various efforts being undertaken to increase gender equality and women's empowerment.

I am pleased to say that Nepal has a vibrant movement of non-governmental organizations, which has been an ally of the Government in Nepal's efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Non-governmental organizations have been particularly effective in raising awareness of women's issues, changing attitudes and advocacy and as lobbying and pressure groups both in Nepal and abroad. This partnership will be further strengthened and a broader partnership with the private and other sectors will be sought in our efforts to achieve our goals for women.

We will further intensify our efforts, as we are fully aware that, without the equal and meaningful partnership of women, our problem of endemic poverty and underdevelopment will not diminish. We will do our best. Understandably, however, our efforts alone will not be enough. We are aware that the greatest responsibility rests with the individual nations. Their actions will go a long way towards improving the status of women in their own countries. This, however, does not lessen the responsibility of the world community, especially the developed countries, many of whose resource commitments expressed in various world conferences remain unfulfilled. In spite of the fact that the developed economies are doing well, it is a sad irony that, except for a few exemplary countries, official development assistance from the developed countries is decreasing, both in real terms and as a proportion of their gross domestic product.

To conclude, Nepal once again renews its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. This is not because others say so, but because this is imperative for us. Nepal also urges the world community, especially the developed world, to be much more forthcoming in the fulfilment of their commitment to the cause of women of the world.

It will be most unfortunate if our next review still finds the situation of women not significantly improved due to unfulfilled commitments. This review session, therefore, is the right time for all partners to reflect on their own commitments and to rededicate themselves, in the spirit of true partnership, to gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

The Acting President *(spoke in French):* I now give the floor to Her Excellency Baroness Margaret Jay of Paddington, Minister for Women and leader of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Baroness Jay of Paddington (United Kingdom): It gives me great pleasure to present the United Kingdom national statement to this conference. We have come a long way since 1995. In the United Kingdom we have driven through a new approach to improving women's lives.

I am the Minister for Women in the Cabinet, and I am here with my ministerial colleague, Valerie Amos, who has special responsibility for the work on the women's development agenda. I work with the Women's Unit in the Cabinet Office, at the heart of Government, to implement policies across the whole of Government — policies that give opportunity and choice to women. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that women in the United Kingdom and throughout the world can achieve their true potential.

Our approach in the United Kingdom is driven by our commitment to fairness, social justice and equality of opportunity. We want everyone to have the chance to fulfil their potential. These are values that we hold at home and values that I know all of us here today share.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that global economic success and the elimination of poverty depends on the fulfilment of our commitment to uphold the human rights and freedoms of women. Women make up half the global workforce. We work in a wide variety of roles: as farmers, in commerce, in manufacturing, in the service industries and as business owners and entrepreneurs.

But there remain major economic inequalities between men and women — inequalities in access to land and credit; the gap between women's and men's lifetime incomes; and women's unpaid workloads, such as childcare, domestic and community work.

We can address these differences, these imbalances, by improving women's choices and opportunities in education and training. We must equip women to play a full and equal part in the twenty-first century economy by lifelong learning programmes which include the new technologies and new skills.

This is precisely what we are doing in the United Kingdom and through our international development efforts. Education is at the heart of our strategy. In the United Kingdom, girls excel at school. More girls than boys now go to college or to university; that is a rise of 14 per cent in just 16 years.

But when women leave school, they are still mostly working in low-paid jobs. Sixty per cent of women are in the 10 lowest-paid occupations in the United Kingdom. This occupational segregation is the main cause of the gap between women's and men's lifetime earnings. To redress this imbalance, we are finding ways to encourage girls into non-traditional and higher-paid occupations.

Education enhances economic and life choices. It improves health. There is no stronger argument for renewing our commitment and accelerating our progress towards meeting the Beijing objectives.

Closing gender gaps in education must be our top priority. Equality cannot be a reality while there are still 600 million women in the world who can neither read nor write.

In the United Kingdom we are committed to developing economic policies for growth and for prosperity. We are also committed to social policies that tackle poverty and social exclusion and therefore improve choice and opportunity for everyone.

Over the past 25 years in my country an economic and employment revolution has taken place. There are more women at work than ever before in the United Kingdom. Over half of all women — double the number 25 years ago — now work, and eight out of 10 mothers work outside the home.

Since 1997 our Government has introduced new measures to support women's choices: a National Minimum Wage, which gave over one million women an immediate pay raise and closed the pay gap between men and women by 1 per cent in just one year; improved employment rights for all part-time workers — the majority of whom are women — including improved rights to parental leave; a tax credit system for low-income families which includes help with childcare costs; a National Childcare Strategy which aims to provide new childcare places for one million children; and the development of a new framework to provide support for women who want to set up their own businesses.

These measures, along with others, are designed to lift working families in the United Kingdom out of poverty and give women the opportunity to have successful working lives as well as successful home lives.

We recognize that we can also do more throughout the world by working in partnership to improve women's contribution to the global economy and to improve their social status. In the current, rapidly expanding economic context, the continuing existence of a pay gap between men and women is both an anomaly and an inefficiency.

In the last six months, the United Kingdom Women's Unit has published research which exposes for the first time the true extent of that pay gap within the United Kingdom. It is a horrifying fact that the averagely educated woman earns nearly a quarter of a million pounds sterling, or nearly $400,000, less than her male counterpart. That is over her lifetime, and it is simply as a result of being female. It is what we call the female forfeit. If she has children, she forgoes a further 140,000 pounds, or just over $200,000.

These facts are stark, and we must tackle the root causes of this continuing anomaly. Women in developing countries, who make up the majority of the world's poor, suffer even more acutely. In this global age, we must strive for true economic equality for women everywhere.

Women will not be able to achieve their potential if they do not have equal access to health services. Reproductive and sexual rights are fundamental. If women are not healthy, our societies and our economies will not be healthy. This is especially apparent when we consider the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is set to challenge the success of the global economy. Women now represent half of all adults infected with HIV, and more women than men are now contracting the virus. I welcome the fact that the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations is to look more closely at this important issue.

Before concluding, I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to our document "Equality in practice: A celebration and an agenda for the future", which we published today. It documents examples of good practice by the United Kingdom Government and our partners, at home and abroad, in supporting women's contribution to their economies, their communities and their families. For example, it includes the partnerships our Department for International Development has formed in many countries to provide support to women's enterprise through micro-credit and other schemes. It reflects that a lot has been done and a lot achieved since 1995, but it also makes it very clear that there is still much more to do.

We should pledge ourselves to go forward from this meeting with renewed determination to accelerate our progress, so that we can liberate the potential of women everywhere. Let us remember our purpose. This is not a "talking shop" — we, as State leaders, are here to recommit to achieving the goal we set ourselves five years ago — the goal of equality for women everywhere.

I hope I have shown in these brief few minutes how the adoption of a positive approach to the women's agenda in our work in the United Kingdom

has enabled us to support women's choices and aspirations. We have done a lot to deliver these, but there is a lot still to do.

Of course, we need to work in partnership with others, including non-governmental organizations and business and trade unions, to bring about long-term, sustainable change. We want to work with the United Nations and with all present to ensure that opportunities are extended to the majority of women in every country. We want everyone to share in the wealth and success that is being generated worldwide. If we maintain our ideals and combine these with practical strategies and practical action, women will have real choice and will fulfil their aspirations, and all our societies will be enhanced by their vital and important contribution.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Her Excellency Ms. Annelies Verstand-Bogaert, Secretary of State for Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands.

Ms. Verstand-Bogaert (Netherlands): Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Beijing, New York: stopovers on the long road that leads to the emancipation of women all over the world. These are places for looking back, places for explanation and reflection and places for scouting new ways and for mapping out routes.

Beijing, 5 years ago: I remember the colourful diversity, the differences of opinion; so many languages, so many cultures, so many wishes, so many ideals. And still there were moments when all those different people spoke with one voice.

Beijing led to the adoption of the Platform for Action. Implementation of the high ideals that had been set out in so many declarations and resolutions in the previous years — that was what we intended to do, each one in her own country, in her own language and in her own culture.

Action: action speaks louder than words. Take, for instance, gender mainstreaming, making gender an integral part of government policy. And not just because we have resolved to do so, but because it benefits all of society and because we cannot ignore gender without paying the price.

In the past five years, the Netherlands has put words into action. In the Netherlands, emancipation policy is now becoming an integral part of government policy. All ministries have formulated action plans with concrete targets and activities to integrate emancipation. What is more, the process of implementation is actually under way; sometimes maybe slowly, but steadily.

The European Union has acknowledged that trafficking in women can be effectively prevented and combated only if all parties involved — non-governmental organizations, aid organizations, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, embassies and migration authorities — cooperate with one another. That is gender mainstreaming at the European level. What specifically matters now is the appointment of national rapporteurs on the prevention and combating of trafficking in women. The Netherlands was the first country to make such an appointment. My hope is that other countries will follow shortly because the international exchange of information on these developments is crucial for combating this organized crime.

The Netherlands is making an effort to enhance the participation of women and the integration of gender expertise in the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The contribution of women to the prevention of conflicts, to the formulation of mandates for missions, to the preservation of peace and to the implementation of peace treaties has become indispensable.

Since Beijing there is a lot to report, but there still remains a lot to do. That is becoming increasingly clear to us. The world is getting smaller all the time. Via multimedia, our eyes and ears are present in the remotest corners of the world, and that small, big world opens our eyes to differences — differences between cultures, religions and traditions, in and between countries and peoples; differences in development, socially, economically, and politically; a colourful diversity, as we experience more and more within our own multi-ethnic society.

It is precisely this variety, this diversity that holds an important challenge for future emancipation policies, nationally and internationally. Women and men should have the opportunity to build an independent life based on equal rights, opportunities and liberties, despite any differences in sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The message for future emancipation policies is to work towards conditions for a pluriform society in

which diversity is the basic assumption and in which discrimination is not tolerated. Freedom of choice for women and men is essential and should be ensured in all phases of life. Each individual should have the option of an economically independent life and a fair distribution of labour, care and income, free of poverty and violence.

This vision does not allow any violations of human rights. Recently, the Netherlands Government published a policy paper "From women's lib to inalienable rights", which presents our vision in this connection. The rights-based approach is also one of our main objectives during this special session of the General Assembly.

Diversity means doing justice to variety. But diversity is more. Diversity also implies that there are boundaries to some of the values and standards of people's cultures, boundaries that are crossed when the universal rights of women, the human rights of women, are violated. Therefore, diversity should always be regarded in a context of non-discrimination and of compliance with universal human rights.

When we speak of violation of human rights of women, we particularly have in mind violence against their sexual and reproductive rights and issues such as violence against women, sexual abuse, trafficking in women, female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes.

Recent figures show that on a global scale at least one in three women has been battered or sexually abused in her life. Then there are the consequences women and men have to suffer as a result of their sexual orientation and as victims of harmful traditional practices and of crimes committed in the name of honour.

Every day we are confronted by figures and practices that do not fail to shock us, and this urges us to take further action. Recent figures show that women are struck hardest by the catastrophe of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Netherlands is the second largest donor country when it comes to HIV/AIDS. Even so, we are aware that this is but a drop in the ocean. There is still a lot more to be done. The AIDS virus takes millions of victims precisely where ignorance reigns and where no contraceptives are being used: in traditional societies, with traditional practices, where women are married off, even though their future husbands carry AIDS, and where women contaminate their children through breast-feeding.

What is required first and foremost is information, for women and from a woman's perspective. But secondly, political leadership, full acknowledgement and a fully open public debate on the scourge of HIV/AIDS are necessary. What is required is education, breaking taboos and promoting the use of contraceptives. We know that this will work; we can see it from countries where a radical change for the better has taken place. What is equally necessary is that women's rights, sexual rights and reproductive rights be respected and that women also be free to use them: free from threats of coercion, discrimination and violence. Very often this still is not the case.

This creates obligations. It compels us to take action, for instance, against female genital mutilation and so-called honour crimes. I am referring to action in the field of information, education and prosecution. Harmful traditional practices that violate the human rights of women cannot be tolerated. Sexual and reproductive rights also imply sex education for young people and support for teenage mothers, so that pregnancies may be avoided and choices for the future made. In the Netherlands we know that this works, because the rate of abortion in the Netherlands is the lowest in the world.

Acknowledgement of diversity and the creation of the conditions that enable freedom of choice for women and men in every phase of their lives: this calls for action, so that women and men, free from violence and discrimination, can truly choose the form of cohabitation that they wish, their sexual orientation not being any hindrance. That is why Dutch legislation includes registered domestic partnership for partners of the same sex. And right now, there is even a bill under discussion that would make marriage between homosexuals possible.

Action: that was the key word in Beijing five years ago, when the Platform for Action came to be. As far as the Netherlands is concerned, it still is the key word. The Netherlands wants to strongly support this cause once again — indeed, with increased urgency. A world rich in diversity, but based on equal treatment and the acknowledgement of the universal rights of women: that is what we all should aim for.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lazaros Savvides,

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order of Cyprus.

Mr. Savvides (Cyprus): My delegation has aligned itself with the statement of the European Union.

It is a great honour and privilege to address the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, dedicated to the appraisal and assessment of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It is indeed very important now, at the beginning of the new millennium and five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, to take stock of all the important work that has been done, to identify and discuss the problems and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Platform for Action and to consider further actions and initiatives to accelerate its implementation.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Commission on the Status of Women, which served as a preparatory committee for this special session, as well as to all the specialized agencies which have been actively involved in the various preparatory activities.

The Beijing Conference expanded the agenda on the human rights of women, renewing hopes for the achievement of gender equality and for the advancement of women. Worldwide, women's issues have been and will continue to be inspired and developed within the framework of the guidelines and the strategic objectives set in the Beijing Platform for Action.

For Cyprus, the Beijing Conference has given new impetus, strengthened political will and intensified efforts towards legal and de facto equality, which have been promoted in particular ever since the 1985 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a most important landmark in the advancement of women. Cyprus also welcomes the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to that Convention, which it considers to be yet another important step forward.

Based on the Platform for Action and the commitments made by the Government of Cyprus at the Beijing Conference, we are very pleased to observe that progress has been achieved in all critical areas of concern, and in particular in those areas which fall within our priorities, including the following.

Legal reform aiming at the elimination of the few remaining discriminatory provisions and the further safeguarding of women's rights in all fields of law has been pursued with very positive results.

In addition to a series of laws in the field of family and labour legislation, of particular significance are the recent enactment of the law on the trafficking in and exploitation of women and children, and the recent amendment of the citizenship law, granting Cypriot women equal rights regarding the citizenship of their children. I am, therefore, very pleased to announce that Cyprus is now ready to withdraw its single reservation to article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and will be informing the depository of the Convention shortly.

The participation of women in politics has been another priority area in recent years. Emphasis has been given to the organization of special training programmes aimed at encouraging women to enter politics and at supporting them, as well as at creating a more friendly environment for women within political parties. Other measures include the setting up of a non-party lobby group, the sensitization and mobilization of the mass media to support this cause, and the political appointment of women in highly influential posts, including those of Ombudsperson, Auditor-General and Assistant Accountant-General of the Republic.

In addition to political appointments, the presence of women at all levels of the hierarchy within the civil service has also been increased, with their participation reaching 60 per cent in the Planning Bureau, 18 per cent in the diplomatic service and 62 per cent in the Law Office of the Republic.

Violence against women has been another top-priority area. Emphasis has been placed on the development of the appropriate legal framework and on measures facilitating its implementation and enforcement. These measures include the setting up of a multisectoral advisory committee, which monitors the implementation of the law, the promotion of scientific research, the strengthening of cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the provision of support and assistance to victims of such violence and the development of an effective training programme for

members of the police and all other professionals involved in the handling of domestic violence cases.

The economic independence of women has been pursued through the improvement and expansion of childcare facilities, the promotion of equal pay and the legislative improvement of maternity protection, which now provides for 16 weeks of maternity leave, as well as for vocational guidance and training.

Cyprus, as a candidate for accession to the European Union, has been working intensively during the last few years, pursuing the necessary adaptations on laws and policies in order to comply fully with European Union standards. Some very important legal instruments are currently being prepared as part of the harmonization process, including the law on equal treatment and equal opportunities, which will provide for the creation of an enforcement mechanism.

Last but not least, let me refer to some important developments in the area of women and peace. The women of Cyprus, who have for the last 26 years experienced the tragic consequences of occupation and displacement, have been particularly sensitive to matters of human rights and peace. The women's movement has been very active all these years in protesting against the illegal occupation through mass peaceful marches and in creating a culture of peace on the island through various activities, including the promotion of bi-communal contacts aimed at exploring ways for peaceful conflict resolution.

As a result of their growing consciousness and mobilization on peace issues, the International Eco-Peace Village has recently been established, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, which supports the whole project. Through specialized training and exchange programmes, the Eco-Peace Village will play a significant role in the promotion of women's participation in the peace-building process and the creation of a culture of peace on the island and, hopefully, in the region.

The progress achieved in Cyprus towards the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action can be attributed to a great extent to the substantial work of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, which has been at the forefront of efforts to mobilize the entire Government sector and civil society on issues of gender equality.

The budget of the National Machinery, through which projects and organizations are subsidized, has been increasing considerably during the last few years. Efforts to secure additional financial and human resources and upgrade its status will be continued in order to enable it to perform effectively its future role, which goes far beyond the development of women's specific activities and extends to the inclusion of gender perspectives in all national plans and policies.

The Government of Cyprus remains strongly committed to the pursuit of further policies and programmes promoting legal and real equality between women and men. This commitment stems from the belief that bringing about gender equality is a necessity dictated by the long-term requirements of the economic and social development of our country.

The twentieth century could aptly be described as the one in which the forces for the advancement of women were set in motion. Although the gains in this endeavour have been considerable, much remains to be done. For as we strive to create a better world for future generations — one in which the human rights of all will be fully respected — we cannot but intensify our individual and collective efforts to achieve full equality between women and men. Let us work towards making the twenty-first century the one in which this noble goal is fully realized.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before giving the floor to the next speaker, I would like to remind members that the time limit for speeches during this session is seven minutes. I would like to be able to hear the statements of all the speakers.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nasly Lozano, Counsellor to the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mrs. Lozano (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am greatly honoured to take the floor on behalf of my country at this special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

We, members of the international community, both women and men, have come together for this important session to renew and strengthen our common commitment to achieve ever-more equitable and just societies, in which men and women can aspire to lead more dignified and productive lives and gain broader

access to goods and services with equal rights and under equal conditions.

Today in Colombia, all men and women are committed to peace. President Pastrana's Administration is aware that peace means more than signing negotiated agreements. In Colombia, we all know that in order to attain peace we must ensure that human rights, gender equality and sustainable social justice prevail. We have before us the challenge of recreating the social fabric and building a just, tolerant and equitable society that will allow access to, and the full exercise of, citizenship for all the boys and girls and women and men of our nation.

For the Colombian State, this session on equality, justice and peace is extremely important. This process of reviewing the commitments undertaken in Beijing five years ago is allowing us to take a fresh look at the situation of women and girls and to reaffirm our inescapable commitment to the advancement of women and the elimination of inequalities between men and women. Cairo, Beijing, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Lima have offered us a framework for the development of our programmes.

From the moment that the Platform for Action was signed, the situation and the condition of women have made significant progress. On 31 May this year, just six days ago, our country passed the first law on affirmative action, establishing rules for the proper and effective participation of women at the decision-making levels of the various branches and bodies of the public sector. By effecting cultural changes, the educationally based law number 581 is intended to overcome inequalities in women's ability to make important decisions affecting the country. From now on, we will have a democracy that includes women's perspectives.

This law provides for the mandatory participation of women in at least 30 per cent of administrative posts in the public sector at the decision-making level in the executive, legislative and judicial branches, nationally, regionally and locally. Although the minimum of 30 per cent is not applied to administrative and judicial career posts or elected posts, the law provides for mechanisms so that the civil servant selection processes will include the same proportion of women and men in the list of candidates for each position. In the case of posts that require a list of three candidates, at least one woman should be included. The law provides for a national plan for the advancement and development of women, which will define mechanisms that will ensure the participation of women in all spheres, including the private sector.

The Government of Colombia has acknowledged that violence against women and girls in the privacy of their homes constitutes a violation of their fundamental rights and a problem of public health, and is becoming a barrier to the social and economic development of the country. In Colombia, 200 cases of family violence are recorded every day, of which 70 per cent are perpetrated against women in couple relationships. The Government has undertaken an ambitious public policy that seeks to have an impact on the causes that lead to violent responses, to ensure early detection of cases, to generate referral and cross-referral mechanisms and to provide integrated, ethical and sustained care for victims and aggressors, in particular aggressors who are minors and those committing marital violence. Through the Make Peace programme, hotlines, emergency shelters for women and their children, free health-care services and legal programmes will be established.

With this programme, we have amended the law for the prevention of ,protection against and sanctioning of domestic violence, expanding coverage to include the care of victims, giving authority to a greater number of judges and to the local authorities that work directly in the communities, in order to hear of cases of family violence, and ensure effective intervention and immediate protection measures for victims.

This law also has an educational purpose and seeks to have an impact on the cultural transformation of relationships in which power is abused and conflicts are resolved with violence as occurs every day, by men against women and by adults against boys and girls.

Another significant achievement in the area of public policies for women is the plan for equal opportunities for men and women. The plan aims to eliminate existing inequalities and to make a reality of the equality provisions contained in the Colombian Constitution and in the international agreements that the country has signed.

The strategic lines of the plan consider the most critical points in the obstacles to the full equality of women. Its main areas are institutional strengthening;

employment and generation of income; overall health, reproductive health and health security; education; housing; participation in structures of power and decision-making; violence against women; armed conflict; and women in rural areas.

The situation of internal armed conflict that our country is facing has had a profound and painful impact on the lives of all Colombian men and women. It is not only a matter of the violent and premature deaths of thousands of men and women; it is also the suffering of widows and orphans; the uprooting and uncertainty of families that are forced to abandon their villages and lands, intimidated by fear; the distress and anxiety of the families of kidnapping victims; in short, the profound and immeasurable impact that a conflict of this nature has on society.

Given the pain suffered by the Colombian people because of widespread violence, we have an unequivocal commitment to the right to life. Therefore, we firmly reject any action that would mean a threat to life, including abortion. The right to life is a supreme right enshrined in our political charter and ratified by our legislation.

War has a different impact on men and women. Men are the main victims of armed conflict, but women, the survivors of terror, have to continue raising children, take the leading role in their homes and be responsible for healing and reconstruction in the aftermath of war.

One of the most tragic consequences of conflict is the forced displacement of thousands of women, boys and girls who, stalked by fear and intimidation, are obliged to leave their homes and start new lives in conditions that offer very fragile prospects for survival. Internal displacement takes place both massively or collectively and individually. The silence of forced individual migrations makes it difficult to determine the exact dimensions of the phenomenon. The tragedy of individual displacement, in which hundreds of women and children leave their homes to seek protection in nearby villages, is one of the most difficult, as it does not cause obvious problems of public order and therefore remains unseen by society at large. This type of displacement is of unknown magnitude, and its lack of visibility impedes and hinders the State from re-establishing the migrants' violated rights.

The effects of forced displacement are devastating. Families, often the exclusive responsibility of women, have to face the challenge of generating income in environments unknown to them, in many cases without having the capacity to assume a new productive role; and sometimes there is the additional difficulty of meeting with rejection from the communities to which they go. Colombian cities are not prepared to receive masses of people coming from rural areas, and this has caused the belts of misery around the urban areas to grow.

In the area of education, health and public services, and after armed incursions, thousands of boys, girls and women are totally abandoned, because the teachers, health professionals and even the local authorities are so afraid that they decide to abandon their villages or to limit the services they offer.

There are many other challenges that Colombia has to face in order to ensure its women the full observance of their human rights, but undoubtedly the most urgent relate to public order and rising in the country. In order to overcome this situation, we require the solidarity and cooperation of the international community.

To conclude, we need to acknowledge that poverty has not diminished in Colombia. Fifty-five per cent of the people in Colombia live in poverty, and 22 per cent in extreme poverty. The fertility rates of young people between 15 and 19 years of age are increasing, despite efforts to provide adequate sexual and reproductive health services. I would like to clarify that when we refer to these services we are not including abortion; rather, we concentrate our efforts on family planning and on ensuring safe motherhood, ensuring that women have access to high-quality health services, preventing unsafe abortion and providing post-abortion counselling.

Finally, on behalf of my delegation, I should like to repeat the words of our Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez, who has written that, after 15,000 years of poor male government, the time has finally come for women to take power.

The Acting President *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Maitha Salem Al-Shamsi, Adviser to Her Highness, the First Lady, President of the United Arab Emirates Women's Association.

Ms. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): We sincerely congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". We wish him all the best in his leadership of this session and in the achievement of its desired objectives.

I am pleased to participate today in this meeting held at this international forum to evaluate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In my capacity as a representative of the United Arab Emirates, I convey the greetings of the people of the Emirates, who have witnessed a quantitative and qualitative breakthrough in the field of human development, thanks to the wise leadership of His Highness, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the State of the United Arab Emirates, and to the outstanding care and sincere efforts of Her Highness, Mrs. Fatima bint Mubarak, First Lady of the United Arab Emirates and President of the United Arab Emirates Women's Association.

World societies have entered the new millennium with varying degrees of economic growth, technological advancement and information development. They all, however, benefit from a number of lessons learned in the past millennium and strive to achieve higher production, social coherence and cultural prosperity. These societies have dedicated all their technological, material and human potential to that end. Despite the variety and multiplicity of machinery earmarked for the achievement of this goal, the participatory machinery, as defined by the societies of the past millennium and approved by conferences held under the auspices of the United Nations — from Nairobi and Cairo to Beijing — remains in effect. Its importance has been emphasized by national and international development institutions.

Participation, especially for women, is both a means and an end. It is an end in that it validates their worth and their status as citizens and workers in the State. It is a means to enable women to obtain their economic entitlements and to activate their roles in most fields of development, as well as allowing them to compete with a view to occupying an adequate social status.

The wise leadership of the United Arab Emirates strives tirelessly to foster cooperation among various national and international development organizations while it pursues a unique approach to addressing all human societies and international instruments rationally and reasonably. On this basis, the United Arab Emirates participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women and committed itself to benefiting from the concepts contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, in conformity with the specificities of our Islamic society, so as to enhance our society's capabilities and the effectiveness of our leadership and its women cadres in coping with international variables. We have demonstrated cultural flexibility and avoided conflicting cultural rigidity.

As we all know, the Beijing Conference was held to reconfirm support for the struggles of women. Unlike the two previous Conferences, it focused on practical applications and accorded priority to efforts to achieve equality, development and peace. The Conference also sought to urge the international community to realize and ensure women's enjoyment of their rights and to assist and enable them to play a productive role. It recognized the need to guarantee equal opportunities in education and health care with a view to elevating women's living standards.

The United Arab Emirates is among those countries that are keen to implement the Platform for Action. We have therefore taken a number of steps and summoned our capacities to implement the provisions of the Platform in order to enhance the status of women, guarantee their enjoyment of their social and political rights in harmony with our Islamic customs and traditions, and foster their capacity to develop in general and their productive capacities in particular. Such steps are embodied in a strategy that Her Highness, Mrs. Fatima bint Mubarak, the First Lady, drew up in order to ensure the rights of women to ownership, which is obligatory under Islamic law, which is the Constitution of the State, and to guarantee their right to employment, education, medical treatment and social and health care.

This strategic dimension has been the basis for the drafting of all our plans and programmes, translating the strategy from mere ambition to tangible reality. These plans and programmes have been implemented and followed up by myriad ministries representing the State — the Ministries of Education, Planning, Economic Affairs, Health, Employment and Social Affairs — and by a number of

non-governmental organizations, particularly women's associations.

The following facts highlight further achievements that have led to the improvement of numerous factors affecting women in the United Arab Emirates. Women's education in the Emirates has attracted much attention and is widely accepted. Several achievements have been made in this field. The State, through its development programmes, has given powerful momentum to education, while education policy is based on equal opportunities for men and women. Current statistics available on the number of boys and girls enrolled in school show an increase in the percentage of female enrolment from primary to higher education. The State is also eager to develop new educational processes and to support female cadres in the scientific and technical specializations, thus keeping abreast of world technological developments. As to higher studies, female cadres are also being encouraged in various ways to contribute further to society after graduation.

In the economic sphere, the educational preparation of women has borne fruit in their practical contributions, which are on the rise every year in the United Arab Emirates. The presence of women is being felt without discrimination in all spheres of economic activity. They occupy all professions alongside men and receive equal pay for equal work.

In the field of health, the United Arab Emirates has paid considerable attention to health services. This has been amplified in the horizontal and vertical expansion of health and rehabilitation facilities and institutions. Great strides in the evolution of diagnostic procedures have been made. Moreover, human resources in the field of therapeutic medicine have been developed qualitatively and quantitatively. Numerous programmes designed to advance women's health have also been implemented.

Women are being encouraged to complete their education and training and to prepare for the future through their involvement in women's social associations, clubs and voluntary work that contribute meaningfully to the improvement of health care and to the physical and psychological preparation of girls for motherhood through special awareness programmes on nutrition, obesity and healthy lifestyles. Awareness is further raised on the concept of reproductive health and its significance.

Many programmes seek to prepare citizens to contribute to the health sector by encouraging them to enter the nursing profession and to join in the professional and administrative preparedness in the health sector. The State of the United Arab Emirates fully appreciates the leading role being played by women in the development of health services.

A number of programmes have been implemented to offer further opportunities for women to receive education and information in science, technology and economics so as to enhance their knowledge and skills and allow them to take part in environmental decision-making. Women are being involved in the drafting of plans for managing natural and environmental resources and for following up and monitoring their implementation. This involvement includes women's participation in health and environmental control committees.

The participation of women in the enacting of environmental legislation has a direct impact on the health and prosperity of women and their families.

Women in the United Arab Emirates have always been very active in the mass media — sharing their views and discussing all kinds of topics.

The wise leadership of the United Arab Emirates and the officials in charge of the relevant programmes and plans are fully mindful of the fact that despite these achievements, a number of objectives must still be realized and a number of steps taken. There is also vast potential to be explored in order to enable humankind, and women in particular, to progress along the path to development and cope with the technological, economic and social dimensions of the process.

On that basis, the major factors that will help us achieve these goals and carry out these measures all emanate from the specific characteristics of United Arab Emirates society, its Islamic civilization and its cultural values, which call for cooperation with international organizations in a spirit of openness, not rigidity. This same spirit of openness characterizes our dealings with all societies and civilizations, allowing us to benefit from each other's experiences, exchange views, cooperate with one another, rid ourselves of conflicts and divisions and work to bring about a world where love and peace prevail.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mrs. Elisenda Vives, Chief of the Cabinet of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Andorra.

Mrs. Vives (Andorra) *(spoke in Catalan; English text furnished by the delegation)*: Our presence at this special session of the United Nations is proof that the Principality of Andorra is giving special attention to the status of women worldwide. Andorra's concern has led it to follow up, with the means at its disposal, on all aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Andorra's joining the United Nations gave us the opportunity to belong to this forum, in which all States have a say. Despite our small size, we have a responsibility to act with solidarity, provide support and make every effort to achieve the goals of peace, freedom and full respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This responsibility has been enshrined in the Constitution of Andorra. It affirms that all persons are equal before the law. No one may be discriminated against on account of nationality, race, sex, origin, religion, opinion or any other personal or social condition. It states that the public authorities must create conditions in which individuals enjoy true equality and freedom.

Respect for human rights is a right and a reality in Andorra. However, we still have a long way to go before we achieve true equality between men and women. The first step forward is to become aware of the situation and accept this fact.

Since 1993, when Andorra adopted its Constitution and became a Member of the United Nations, a major legislative effort has been under way, and the signing of various international conventions has been complemented by internal legislation. Work is continuing on the adoption of other texts, among them the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This year we will be presenting our first report on the situation of women, as provided for by this Convention.

The signing of these conventions has led to our doing a great deal of groundwork and internal reflection, prompting us to assess the situation in our country.

In recent decades we have seen a continuing transformation and constant progress in the status of women. Mrs. Angela E.V. King said in one of her statements that surely the most peaceful social revolution of the twentieth century was the transformation of the status of women. This assertion is borne out by the change in the status of women in Andorra, who have gone, in the second half of this century, from living in a mountainous rural society, where they had a traditional role, to a modern society of wage earners in which it is estimated that 62 per cent of women have a job.

With regard to activity sectors, Andorra is no exception to the situation in Western Europe as a whole. The presence of women in sectors which have been traditionally considered "tough", such as in the primary sector, the building industry and garages, for instance, is minimal, whereas they have a strong presence in professions related to health care, administration or teaching. In the Andorran workplace, inequalities between the sexes are still visible. In general, women do work that requires fewer qualifications, and decision-making in business is mainly done by men. The gap between the average wages of men and women is 32 per cent in favour of men, despite the fact that legal provisions are very clear on questions of remuneration, since they forbid any type of discrimination account of a worker's gender.

The public authorities have adopted two provisions with a view to improving the status of working women: it is forbidden to fire pregnant women without notice, and maternity leave can be shared between both parents.

Efforts are also being made in Andorra to raise awareness, through the media, of the fact that any discriminatory or harassing act in the workplace is reprehensible. The Labour Inspection service is equipping itself to see that current labour regulations are complied with and will provide full information and advice to anyone making a request in this respect.

A network of ancillary support services — holiday camps, leisure centres, and so on — financed mainly by the public authorities enable women working outside the home to combine more effectively their duties in regard to family and work. However, the economic structure of the country makes this difficult. A good part of Andorra's population is employed in the retail and hotel sectors. These sectors are noted for long working hours. Days off vary week by week, and

the periods of most work tend to coincide with weekends and school holidays.

A survey carried out the by the Association of Women of Andorra, with the support of the Government of Andorra and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), has shown that in our country sexist attitudes to women are changing. Such behaviour is no longer determined by gender but by age. The age group that has the most prejudices is that of people between 45 and 65 years of age.

This change of attitude towards the role of women in society is partially the result of the general access to education. More than 56 per cent of the country's university students are women, and although they are mainly found in the education, health and human and social sciences fields, the percentage of women in technical and scientific areas is constantly increasing.

The Department of Education sees to it that everyone has access to absolutely free schooling from age 3 to age 16, without discrimination. Another important point is that students participate in educational programmes for peace and tolerance carried out in coordination with UNESCO and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) programmes.

Teachers receive ongoing training, which enables them to deepen their knowledge of their particular subject of expertise and to acquire personal techniques that enable them to teach actively in a way that respects the principles of diversity. At the same time, action is being taken to inculcate non-sexist language and eliminate sexist attitudes in children's play activities.

Another axis of the policy to fight against discrimination against women is improvement of their health. In this regard, actions carried out by the Ministry of Health and Welfare are fully integrated into the strategic goals of the Beijing Platform for Action. In January this year a survey on sex inequalities in health determinants, health and the use of health services was published. The main conclusions of this analysis are the following: the proportion of women in general bad health is slightly higher than that of men, and this difference increases in cases of chronic disease; t state of mental health is worse and vitality is lower in women, particularly if they are living with small children; and women are less inclined than men to drink alcohol and to smoke, but they are also less active in sports.

The percentage of women seeking consultation on gynaecological preventive practices is very high; information and awareness-raising campaigns take place annually aimed at increasing and consolidating these habits. The Ministry also has concrete programmes to care for future mothers and children and a youth consultancy scheme aimed at avoidance of adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

A point of great concern for the Government of Andorra is violence against women. In recent years, Andorra has not escaped the general European trend, and reported cases of violence have increased considerably, although the levels are lower than those recorded in neighbouring countries. The quest for solutions for this serious problem is a matter of intense concern for Andorran society as a whole. The nature of Andorran society, which is distributed over a territory of 464 square kilometres where practically everyone knows everyone else, makes it difficult to find an appropriate solution that will not marginalize battered women and will at the same time guarantee their safety.

The Government has set up a working group that includes representatives from the Ministry of Health, the police, the public prosecutor's office and other interested groups to study the causes and consequences of violence against women and to propose preventive measures and effective action. One result of this work has been the drafting of a protocol of coordination for combating violence against women.

In conclusion, I would request that we all be able to work together so that women everywhere in the world may find their proper place, as only a society that is fair to all its members can aspire to a future of progress.

We are particularly sensitive to the situation of girls in many developing countries and insist here that concrete action should be sought, to which we will add our own effort.

Andorran women acquired the right to vote in 1970 and the right to be elected in 1973. Since then our presence in political life has progressively increased.

Over the past 30 years five world forums on women's issues have been convened. They have given us new impetus to move forward, but they have also

revealed new obstacles with regard to women's issues. From the perspective of our own reality, we are aware of the enormous challenge we must face, and we are convinced that the twenty-first century must be the century in which the joint work of women and men all over the world will lead society to the values of justice, solidarity and equality.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on Ms. Sheila Roseau, Director for Gender Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda.

Ms. Roseau (Antigua and Barbuda): It is with a deep sense of honour and privilege that I address this gathering on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of my delegation, to extend to the President and to the other members of the Bureau the congratulations of my Government.

It seems not long ago that we gathered in Beijing to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Beijing Conference and the resulting Platform for Action indicated the commitment of the international community to the goals of gender equality and development. In the process of consensus-building, Governments and civil society formed partnerships to further the global agenda for gender equity. Five years later, we are gathered here to review our achievements, identify obstacles and decide on the way forward.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda made a commitment to carry out the Platform for Action and has made great progress in implementing the recommendations. On the basis of our recognition that a strengthened national machinery for women, with a clear policy role, is essential to the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Directorate of Women's Affairs was renamed the Directorate of Gender Affairs, and was restructured and upgraded. This emphasis on institutional strengthening forms one component of the Government's efforts to mainstream gender in all Government sectors. In this regard, a national plan of action on gender and development is being developed with the involvement of all Government agencies. This plan emphasizes cross-sectoral responsibility for gender-sensitive policy formulation.

In consultation with civil society organizations, five critical areas were prioritized for Antigua and Barbuda. These are poverty, education, health, violence against women and women in decision-making.

The prevention, elimination and punishment of violence against women continues to be a major area of concern. Law reform has been one of the primary responses undertaken by Government since Beijing. The Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1995, which increases the penalty for rape and sexual assault. It also addresses the issue of incest. The Domestic Violence Summary Proceedings Act was passed in 1999. This important legislation guarantees women access to the legal system for the purpose of obtaining quick and affordable protective relief from all types of abuse in the home.

Understanding that substantive changes in the law must be accompanied by cultural and attitudinal change as well as services for victims, several programmes have been initiated, including free legal assistance, a 24-hour crisis hotline, a victims support group, advice counselling and a court advocacy service. Training and education programmes are targeted for health professionals, law enforcement personnel and other officials. Significantly, Antigua and Barbuda signed the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in November 1998.

My Government's commitment to the international human rights system can also be discerned by its presentation of its combined first, second and third periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1997. The Government is now actively engaged in reviewing the Optional Protocol with a view to advancing its ratification processes.

In essence, the political will and commitment to gender equality on our part cannot be questioned. However, while this progress has been noteworthy, we are continually faced with many competing demands for our limited development capital and resources. This resource insufficiency hampers institutional capacity-building, as well as the effective and full implementation of those areas of critical concern. This challenge is shared by many small island developing States, and we call on this Conference to address this issue.

Since Beijing, the terrain of operations has changed. One word captures the essence of the radical changes — globalization. Fuelling this revolution are the rapid information technology and computer advances. In the millennium report, the Secretary-General pointed out that most developing countries have not been able to benefit from the globalization processes in an even and equitable manner.

We wish therefore to endorse General Assembly resolution 54/231 of 22 December 1999, which urges the international community to adopt policies that promote equity in finance, trade and transfer of technology and address the problems of developing countries in the areas of external debt and transfer of resources, financial vulnerability, declining terms of trade and market access.

As a small island State, Antigua and Barbuda has unfortunately been hit by five hurricanes since Beijing. Assessment of damage shows that, because of their multiple family roles, women suffer disproportionately from such natural disasters. My country, within its limited means, has tried on each occasion to mitigate the effects on our women. We look to the international community to assist vulnerable States such as ours in meeting the objectives of development, peace and equality.

All that said, it is essential that an important factor be brought to the fore. Women's entitlement to the enjoyment of all human rights and to advance themselves within the matrix of society should be unquestioned. Throughout the English-speaking Caribbean, women have contributed more than their share with regard to the labour movement and in the process towards decolonization. In many instances, they provided the background for the struggle; and in Antigua and Barbuda, in 1917, they faced the advance of mounted police while the men were in the background. Yet, then as now, women's involvement in the political process, as voters, campaigners and supporters, has not been translated into significant and proportionate representation at the highest levels of political decision-making. Women have a right to be full partners in governance, and this is a necessary component of the political, economic and social development of our society. We still therefore need to meet the challenge of creating that enabling environment in which women will have the resources and the support from both the family and the community to engage in political decision-making in our country. It is our right and we demand it.

This is a historic opportunity for us to move ahead. We therefore look forward to the adoption of further initiatives and programmes to advance the goals of gender equality and development. We look forward to action at the national and the international levels. Civil society organizations have proven themselves to be reliable agents in the advancement of the agenda for gender equality. We hope this session will expand the areas of cooperation among Governments, civil society and the international agencies.

Antigua and Barbuda recognizes and appreciates the important role of international development cooperation in support of our efforts to create an enabling environment for the implementation of the Platform for Action. In this regard, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and both the Caribbean Community and Commonwealth secretariats, the latter particularly for its assistance to the gender mainstreaming efforts of the national machinery.

My Government looks forward to the adoption at the end of this special session of an outcome with clearly identified actions designed to advance further our implementation of the Platform for Action. The full and equal participation of women in all spheres of civil, economic and political life as well as the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women are essential for achieving sustainable development that addresses the needs of all members of society. Our moral commitment to the women of the world demands that we all work creatively, persistently, persuasively and effectively towards achieving the goals of equality, development and peace.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/S-23/PV.5

General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

5th meeting
Wednesday, 7 June 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/S-23/6/Add.1)

The President: Before turning to the item on our agenda for this morning, I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/S-23/6/Add.1. In a letter contained in that document, the Secretary-General informs me that, since the issuance of document A/S-23/6, Antigua and Barbuda has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by Her Excellency The Honourable Wandira Kazibwe, Vice-President of the Republic of Uganda.

Ms. Kazibwe (Uganda): Representatives have come here from all over the world to evaluate how far we have come since we were in Beijing five years ago. I would like to thank all of them for the efforts they have made and the struggles they have been through since we were in Beijing. The text of my country's statement will be distributed, so I will make a few comments on those areas where I think we need to put more emphasis or into which we should look further so as to ensure that the struggle for women's emancipation and for equality continues.

I must say that some things have been done in many countries. But much more must be done to achieve gender parity. In many countries, we are still struggling to get women recognized. In many countries we still have to explain the meaning of the word "gender". For many of us, the word "gender" never appeared in our English learner's dictionary — I do not know about the dictionaries that the French, Portuguese and Spanish speakers use. It is a word that each one of us needs to translate and interpret within our cultures, so that the resistance that appears to be coming from the opposite sex is reduced and so that roadblocks are not put in our way in our struggle.

Many countries have been saying that they have the political commitment. We must define what we mean by "political commitment". Is it only Governments that should make political commitments, or is it for civil society, too, to be committed to the struggle for women's emancipation and gender parity? In Uganda we have passed laws. Our Constitution is hailed as one of the most gender-sensitive constitutions in the whole world, even when it comes to identifying "he" or "she". In our country, when we say "he", we

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must also say "she", because women must be visible. So in all our documents, wherever we write "he", there should also be the word "she". In fact, we are saying that "she" must be the word that is used, because the word "she" includes the word "he".

However, despite the fact that we have a very gender-sensitive Constitution, we have also made laws to enforce the Constitution. But that is not enough. Policies and programmes in the country must be gender-sensitive. We must make sure that women must be seen. They must be visible even when they are not there. I want to remind all representatives about the visibility of their mothers, who were in every nook — even in the cupboard, when they were eyeing the sugar bowl. That is what we need to do so that all decision makers, policy makers and implementers know that if we do not do "A", "B", "C" and "D" the hand of a woman is ready to come down on us.

In Uganda, we consider education to be a very important area with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We have said that every girl and every woman must have an education. Three years ago, we had fewer than 800,000 girls in primary education; right now we have over 3.3 million girls in school. This is a very progressive policy, and the programme is a very progressive programme, having evolved from the policy. But how do we keep these girls in school? As I said earlier, it is not enough to have the Constitution; we must have the policies and the programmes.

But we the activists must continue talking. We must continue asserting our ideas so that these girls stay in school. We have achieved 30 per cent participation by women in local government — in Parliament, it is only at 17 per cent. We have achieved that level of participation because, as women leaders, we realize that the critical areas that touch women's lives are to be found at the local government level. That is where women see their fellow women in action every day — there are not many women who even know what the parliamentary building looks like. So in our quest for good governance, we have ensured that the minimum of 30 per cent goes down to where the women are, and we have achieved levels greater than 30 per cent. All of our boards, which are put in place by Government, include representation by women.

My challenge now is civil society — the non-governmental organizations, the professional bodies and universities and other institutions of learning. We have put too much emphasis on what government has done. The non-governmental organizations have put more emphasis on the implementation of what government wants them to do in those areas where government provides a conducive environment. But what have the professional bodies done to ensure that we put the emphasis in the right place so as to enable us to move in the direction on which we agreed in Beijing?

We need a strong civil society, and I would like to urge colleagues here who are representing government not to fear a strong civil society. A strong civil society is good for government, just as a good strong government is good for civil society. In Uganda, we complement each other. We learn from each other, and that is why we have been able to move ahead, because in Beijing we committed ourselves to working with everybody, to networking, in order to ensure that we achieve our objectives.

However, we must note that there is also too much criticism, even when there are no ideas generated to improve on what is being done. We should therefore work together to ensure that when there is a mistake, and when we could improve, we are in a position to move forward. Another area of concern to us in Uganda is the tapping of local expertise. Many times we see a problem that is specific to us as individuals, and we make it a global problem. We need to do more studies in our localities, to interpret our cultures, to interpret how we are going to incorporate our traditional and non-traditional religions internationally into our gender struggle.

In Uganda, we say, "Think globally, but act locally." We need local agendas. While we have statistics showing what has happened all over the world, we need each country to account to its people, we need each country's leadership to account to the last woman in every village regarding what it has done to achieve what we agreed in Beijing. We must therefore continue to disaggregate data on women, not only on women as women, but to go further and look at youth and at women with disabilities. I must say that in many countries, this has not been done. In Uganda we have started on this struggle; we have even appointed a Minister who is a woman with a disability, and she is handling issues relating to people with disabilities and the elderly. Old women have problems too, and they also rank among the poorest of the poor.

When it comes to the way forward, I must say that many times when we come here we talk about issues that affect women as women, and we do not speak out about those areas which are a must if we are to have women's emancipation. We should talk more about peace and conflict, not only the conflict that brings war, but also the conflict that stops development in our countries. We must talk about the eradication of mass illiteracy, because this is the cause of poverty that is bedevilling many of our countries. We must talk about skills for survival, so that our people have food security, and also become rich — not only rich materially, but also spiritually. We must not be caught in the trap of what is said at the international level. When someone refers to "women's empowerment", all of us go for that, but what does women's empowerment mean for that woman in your village? Now now we are talking about e-commerce. What does e-commerce mean to that woman in your village, when her biggest problem is productivity and improving the quality of what she produces?

We need roads, we need electricity, we need water for production. Without these, you can build a wonderful hospital for women to deliver wonderful children, but if there is no road to take this woman there, she will still die walking to the hospital. We need science teachers, we need doctors, we need engineers, we need experts at every level, and therefore we should talk more about what we envision achieving at the highest level, instead of mere survival. Those of us from countries that are bedevilled by debt should therefore cry out to have the debt cancelled. I can tell the Assembly that in Uganda, because we have had at least part of our debt cancelled, we are able to put part of this money into poverty eradication programmes. That is why we can keep our children in school, that is why you hear so much about Uganda doing so well. As a Government we are transparent, and whatever money we would have paid back as debt, we are putting into programmes that affect women. Let us call out and demand that these debts be cancelled. The money did not actually stay in our countries, most of it even went back where it came from. We should call out for that debt cancellation so that we can move forward.

I would like to ask you, Mr. President, to break with protocol. I am the President of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, and I would now like to call upon a woman who is a Minister in my country and has been called upon to represent women with disabilities from Africa, women who are still disadvantaged. According to protocol, there are only country statements, but women with disabilities do not have a country speaking for them: it is their disability which will speak. I would like to call on this young lady from Uganda, who will give her testimony. In Uganda our Constitution enjoins us to give affirmative action to women, affirmative action to youth and affirmative action to people with disabilities. People with disabilities must be in Parliament, and youth must be in Parliament, because if they are not there, their voices will not be heard. In Beijing I said that is only the one who has that scar who knows how much it itches. If that scar is not on your body, you will not know how to scratch it. Certainly I was lucky not to suffer from polio. She is the only one who can speak for the people with disabilities, and I would like to ask her to say something before I conclude my statement.

Ms. Sekabira (Uganda): I am Florence Nayiga Sekabira, 37 years old, married, with a baby boy of four months. I am a Member of Parliament for people with disabilities. I am a product of the affirmative action that is embraced by the Ugandan Constitution. I am a Minister of State in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, in charge of disability and elderly affairs. I want to seize this opportunity, on behalf of women with disabilities on the African continent, to raise these concerns.

We express our concern that the review of the Beijing Platform for Action has already made reference to progress and challenges for women and girls with disabilities during the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. This is manifested inspite of the absence of statistical evidence regarding the impact on women and girls with disabilities in regional and country reports. We have not been featured or represented in most country forums that discuss the status of women. This is also true for women who are elderly. We therefore demand that the leadership of women at the national, regional and international levels make concerted efforts to involve women and girls with disabilities, together with elderly women, and that all the international and national legal instruments make special reference to our concerns.

We wish to stress that continued exclusion and marginalization of women and girls with disabilities and elderly women are in themselves an abuse of human rights. We are women, girls with disabilities and older women, although we face challenges resulting

from our disabilities and age. We therefore call upon all players in the development process, including United Nations agencies, Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to commit themselves and ensure equal distribution of resources to the cause of women, girls with disabilities and older women.

Ms. Kazibwe (Uganda): Florence Nayiga is testimony to the fact that, at least in my country, Uganda, education is the key emancipator of women, because if she were not educated, she would be in the village, crawling and begging. But she got educated and therefore, in our priorities in Uganda, we are putting emphasis on education. The laws can be there. You can talk about laws, but if you are not educated and you cannot survive on your own, you know that you are condemned to a life of suffering.

On behalf of the women of Uganda, I would like to thank the Secretary-General and the United Nations system for having worked very hard to ensure that this meeting took place. I know that a good number present here were not in Beijing, so it is pleasing to note that the momentum has been kept going. We want to urge representatives to continue ensuring that the United Nations system, the private sector and other institutions continue to support this noble cause. We must do more.

I would like to end by quoting the words of one of the Presidents of the United States. As we continue to struggle for our emancipation, not only must we do more as individuals, but we must remember this:

> "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

The struggle continues.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of Uganda for her important statement.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Laurette Onkelinx, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Employment of Belgium.

Mrs. Onkelinx (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Five years ago, this Assembly met to accomplish a task that gave rise to great hope. We mobilized in order to put the lie to those implacable words that appeared in the Human Development Report 1995: "In no society do women fare as well as men". Our goal was no less than to come up with the means to achieve equality for women and men in order to build a world that is more just and based on a logic of development and peace.

We knew very well that, after the initial enthusiasm, we would be told of the economic, social, cultural and religious obstacles to implementation. We would be asked for more time, more understanding. When obstacles emerge and problems appear, they must be faced and not avoided, the better to be forgotten.

The current situation confirms how much work remains to be done. An analysis also shows that, in order to overcome the inequalities that plague women everywhere, we must advance in the Beijing process through the affirmation of the universal right of women and men to equality, the adoption of policies that embody this right, cooperation between States and the assessment of commitments undertaken in solidarity. In sum, it would be irresponsible to signal any retreat today.

I take this opportunity to welcome the 5 February Luxembourg Declaration of the Francophonie Women's Conference, which exemplifies our stance.

The Human Development Report 1999 indicates that 70 per cent of the poor, or 1.3 billion people, are women. This figure reflects the scope of the economic imbalance burdening women. It also shows that poverty is a phenomenon that must grasped in the gender dimension. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women largely contributed to women's being recognized as agents and full beneficiaries of sustainable development. It also contributed to progress towards a general and systemic concept of equality and highlighted the importance to the achievement of equality that account be taken of the links between economic, social and cultural issues through the 12 priority areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

In its own way, and despite some felicitous developments, Belgium is an exemplar, through its own realities, of the observation that inequality is manifest through an imbalance that clearly works against women in all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life. Women are concentrated in low-income sectors and in certain functions, as well as in atypical jobs. The average gap between male and female wages is over 20 per cent. More women than men experience long-term unemployment and are exposed to the risks of poverty and social exclusion. One out of every five

women is the victim of domestic violence. Women remain the minority in decision-making positions. Thus, in Belgium, much remains to be done.

And yet, the policy of equal opportunity has scored some successes. The Government decided to inscribe it in the Constitution, as it did with the priority goals set for education. Legislation has been adopted in order to ensure a real presence of women in political representation. Mandatory parity on voting lists and in the membership of executive bodies was recently accepted. A campaign and legislation against sexual harassment, primarily in the workplace, have complemented the provisions aimed at eliminating discrimination at work.

Our social security model has evolved to take the gender dimension better into account. A far-reaching reform of the work week is currently under discussion in Belgium, which would allow women and men better to organize their work and personal lives. In brief, Belgium is changing, reflecting a willingness to integrate the Beijing objectives.

Of course, we must do more. Indeed, there is no sphere in which this "equality reflex" is irrelevant: social, educational and training policies; employment policies; economic policy; health; development cooperation; migration policy; or such issues as the settlement of armed conflict, trafficking in people and refugee policy. Thus, we cannot continue to denounce violence against women while we turn away when they seek refuge from it in our homes.

The struggle against injustice perpetrated against women because they are women will make no further progress without an ongoing dialogue between public authorities and civil society. I wish to welcome the action of the non-governmental organizations, not only for their work to implement these objectives, but also for often indicating the road to be taken. The organization of the world march against poverty and violence against women was a concrete and symbolic expression of this. I welcome the role played by Belgian organizations in this demonstration, as well as in all of the exchanges held in the framework of our meeting. I also wish to stress the important role of the labour partners in drafting policies on equality and in the successful follow-up of those policies.

We increasingly feel the need to set our sights on more global objectives — major development objectives that would allow each country to adapt and to make progress on the basis of its own realities. As a result, Belgium is convinced that normative instruments are crucial in order to promote legality in international relations.

As a guarantee of the fundamental rights and freedoms of women, Belgium attaches particular importance to the adoption and universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Protocol, as well as to the draft Protocol on Trafficking in Human Beings and in particular the draft Protocol on Trafficking in Women and Children, complementing the draft Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

I should like also to stress the need to institute the International Criminal Court, which would help effectively to implement respect for women's rights, both universal and individual.

Finally, I believe that it is crucial to apply international labour standards to all forms of labour, in particular those which affect women.

It is not easy to reach a conclusion on such a topic. On behalf of Belgium, I will do so by highlighting three priorities. The first priority is the development of international cooperation. We must — and here I am speaking of my country as well — manage to allocate at least 0.7 per cent of our gross national product to development cooperation. This is an obligation that we can no longer ignore. We must work tirelessly to eradicate poverty and to invest in literacy and education.

The second priority must be the adoption of national and international legislation to combat violence against women, in particular the struggle against certain traditional practices that physically harm women and girls.

Finally, in every forum where it has a voice, Belgium will demand that rights in the area of sexuality, such as reproductive rights, be considered an integral part of human rights. This is truly a keystone of human rights.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Lidia Gutu, Deputy Prime Minister of Moldova.

Mrs. Gutu (Moldova) *(spoke in Romanian; English text furnished by the delegation)*: Let me first take this opportunity to join other delegations in

congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. I am convinced that your skills and your experience will contribute to the success of this session.

It is a great honour for me to participate in this special session. I believe this review offers an excellent framework for evaluating the gender perspective throughout the global system.

The decisions taken at the Beijing Conference have had a decisive impact on promoting the status of women. Since 1995, Member States have tried, through the integrated and balanced approach of the Beijing Platform for Action, to implement and promote programme measures for development and for the equality of women in the world.

Though we have registered substantial progress in some areas of gender equality, there is still the challenge of developing and implementing effective gender-sensitive strategies and methods so as to achieve the objectives of the Platform for Action. In relation to the commitments in the Platform and its critical areas, a review and appraisal of obstacles should be conducted at the national, regional and international levels. This should involve examining the actions taken and the results obtained, as is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General.

The Republic of Moldova believes that the best way of achieving gender equality in the twenty-first century is to ensure that future initiatives are based on best practices and lessons learned from the review and appraisal process. The principles underlying the Beijing Declaration, the Platform for Action and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women constitute a valuable framework for action to offer women and men equal opportunities to participate in social, economic and political life.

With a view to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Republic of Moldova has adopted a National Plan containing urgent measures to improve the status of women. We have set up specialized committees within the presidency and the Parliament to improve the status of women. Within the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, we have created a Department for Family Matters and Equal Opportunities, a specialized structure to implement State policy on promoting social equality for women. We have also created gender units within the ministries. As a result, the number of women holding positions in our State has increased fivefold in the last five years. The number of members of Parliament who are women has increased from 4.5 per cent to 9 per cent.

Through close cooperation between our Government, the specialized agencies of the United Nations system — the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Children's Fund — and other international organizations, as well as various non-governmental organizations, we have developed and are now implementing projects to improve the status of women and children and on health protection and reproductive rights.

Like other delegations, we believe that promoting human rights and the international legal instruments in this field has an important complementary impact on the development of gender equality as set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action. From this standpoint, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which the Republic of Moldova is a party, is one of the most important legal instruments as regards the protection of women's rights.

Accordingly, the Government of the Republic of Moldova reaffirms its strong commitment to promoting gender equality and consolidating the status of women at the national level, within the context of promoting basic human rights.

Following the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Republic of Moldova focused its efforts on developing long-term measures with a view to implementing strategies on creating internal legislative and normative frameworks for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Harmonization of the internal judicial system in the Republic of Moldova with international legal norms and instruments is an essential stage as we move to improve the status of women.

Today my country, like other countries with economies in transition, is undergoing radical structural changes. It is obvious that the vulnerable segments of our society, especially women, need increased social protection during this period of transition. In this context, I should like to point out that

the limited financial and economic resources of the Republic of Moldova have diminished the ability of State institutions to reach, over the medium term, the objectives set out in the National Plan for protection of women.

At the same time, some aspects of globalization and the financial crisis that has affected my country's economy have led to the emergence of new obstacles in the process of economic development, causing a negative impact on the status of women and increasing what has been called the feminization of poverty. Unemployment has increased considerably, and, unfortunately, 68 per cent of the labour market's unemployed are women.

Violence against women, prostitution and the precarious health conditions among women constitute other problems we face and for which we are seeking efficient solutions.

Although lately the Government has undertaken a series of measures at the national level to improve health protection, at present we have a high rate of maternal and infant mortality, and the level of medical assistance provided in rural areas, including to pregnant women, and the rate of prevention of contagious diseases and HIV infection is still low. We also need to improve the training of medical staff specializing in reproductive health.

We are convinced that full implementation of the decisions adopted in 1995 at the World Conference on Women is possible only if declarations and political appeals are followed up by practical steps and the provision of real financial resources.

Our delegation greatly appreciates the importance attached by the Secretary-General and the specialized agencies of the United Nations to achieving the objectives of the Beijing World Conference and to the decisions to be adopted at this session.

As Governments have the primary responsibility for fully implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and further actions and initiatives contained in the final documents of this session of the General Assembly, I would like to reaffirm the Government of the Republic of Moldova's strong support in this regard.

The President: I now call on Ms. Mu Sochua, Minister for Women's and Veterans' Affairs of Cambodia.

Ms. Mu: It is a great honour for me to represent the Kingdom of Cambodia on this very important occasion. Cambodia is a country in the process of recovery after decades of war and the destruction of its social structures. The need for the inclusion and participation of the women of Cambodia in the development process is not merely one of political correctness; rather, it is a prerequisite for the country's economic and social regeneration, a fact of which the Royal Government is well aware, and it is dedicated to the implementation of change.

The Royal Government has taken steps to address the social and economic destruction caused by armed conflict and the emerging challenges of the introduction of free-market economy and globalization, which impinge on the lives of the women of Cambodia and on society in general.

A full-time female Minister of the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs was appointed following the 1998 elections. *Neary Rattanak* — Women are Precious Gems — is a badge we all wear with pride, and is the name of a strategy, a five-year plan, launched in 1999 on International Women's Day, 8 March. It is to guide Ministry operations over the medium-term. The plan elaborates a nationwide effort to examine the status and rights of women and to devise the means to bring women into the decision-making process at all levels.

In applying the *Neary Rattanak* plan, the Ministry of Women's and Veterans' Affairs has not only engaged in policy-making. We have also established clear strategies to mainstream gender and to ensure nationwide mechanisms to monitor the implementation of these strategies, with clear indicators and a checklist to measure the improvement of the status of women and the girl child in four main areas: education, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS, economic empowerment and legal protection.

In order to educate all citizens on the devastating social and economic consequences of trafficking in women and children, the Ministry recently launched a major national campaign for the prevention of all forms of trafficking in women and children. Further, the Ministry of the Interior, in order to improve the capacity of the police, judiciary and prosecutors, launched a programme on law enforcement against sexual exploitation and trafficking in children. Such capacity-building and educational campaigns are

expected to have a deep impact on societal values and the physical protection of girls and women in Cambodia.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has prepared a National Action Plan for Girls' Education, aimed at raising educational attainment among girls. Within this framework, quality and efficiency improvements to basic education for girls will be complemented by support for adolescent girls to continue their basic education.

The key issue of the legal protection of women is now being addressed, in the context of setting up a National Council on Judicial Reform. It will be necessary to integrate gender issues from the earliest stages of development of the comprehensive judicial reform programme in order to establish mechanisms for effective legal protection for women. Other initiatives, such as promoting the recruitment of female officers among the police, appointing women judges, providing intensive training for legal professionals on women's legal rights and training in legal literacy for the general public on gender issues, are also planned.

The Royal Government attaches great importance to increasing women's access to quality health care and services. Since 1996, the Ministry of Health has undertaken far-reaching organizational and financial reforms to strengthen the health-care system, including the quality of and access to services for women and girls. HIV/AIDS has been recognized as a major threat to women. In 1999, a policy on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS was developed to address this growing concern.

With regard to civil society, the social inclusion of women has been addressed by the Royal Government through the active encouragement and participation of women in the planning and management of local development through elected village and commune development committees. Forty per cent of the members of these local development committees are women. This commitment to the inclusion of women in decision-making processes was evident in the large participation of women in the 1998 national election and the entry of 14 women members — an increase from 5 — into the National Assembly.

In my brief statement today, I have summarized the most significant developments with regard to the advancement of women in Cambodia, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action. However, much remains to be done, a fact acknowledged by the Royal Government. My Government is committed to continuing to address these issues. Although the commitment is in place, Cambodia still requires substantial external financial support and solidarity to attain its goals.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Bruce Mariama Aribot, Minister for Social Affairs, Advancement of Women and Childhood of Guinea.

Ms. Aribot (Guinea) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to convey to Mr. Theo Ben Gurirab the congratulations of the delegation of Guinea on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session. I wish also to congratulate the other members of the Bureau, whose assistance we believe will enable the President successfully to discharge his important responsibilities.

My delegation thanks and congratulates Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for this special session, and the other Committee officers for the sense of responsibility they evinced throughout the preparatory work. We are most grateful too to the Secretariat for its fine reports and for the practical arrangements made for the special session.

On behalf of my head of State, His Excellency General Lansana Conté, and on behalf of the Government of Guinea, I thank the Secretary-General for his initiative to convene, at Headquarters, this special session to appraise the level of commitment by Governments and the international community with respect to gender equality and to assess progress since the adoption of the Beijing Programme for Action.

As other speakers have indicated, and as noted in the various reports before us, the international community has made major efforts genuinely to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. While welcoming the success that has been achieved in some areas, we are obliged to say that further effort needs to be made, as indicated by the Secretary-General in his statement at this session.

In the Republic of Guinea, the Beijing Platform for Action is being implemented through strategic guidelines set out in the policy document on the advancement of women 1997-2001, adopted by the Government in December 1996, and spelled out in a framework programme for gender and development. This is a cross-cutting and trans-sectoral programme focused on five major objectives: gender, law and empowerment; gender, economy and the fight against poverty; gender, education and training; gender, health and population; and strengthening the institutional machinery.

In close cooperation with non-governmental organizations, trade unions, civil society and our development partners, the Government of Guinea is working to implement the framework programme for gender and development. That active partnership has led to a number of successes: establishment of a system for informing women of their rights through an increased number of legal aid centres with increased financial, material and human resources; repeal of some legal provisions that discriminated against women; formulation of sectoral development policies with a direct impact on the socio-economic advancement of women; adoption of five framework development programmes, three of them concerned with the eradication of poverty and affecting the status of women; adoption of special measures for easier access by women to resources with a view to becoming more independent; formation of a committee on equality to promote the education of girls; reduction of the illiteracy rate and of disparities between girls and boys in access to education and other training; implementation of programmes to fight HIV/AIDS and of a population and reproductive health project to bolster the achievements of our family planning programme and to support safe motherhood; and defining a framework for cooperation with our development partners.

Despite those successes, we still face obstacles, including low levels of education; a lack of women in decision-making positions; problems in the areas of reproductive health and family planning; a lack of resources, proper mechanisms and microfinancing initiatives for women's projects; the impact of war and armed conflict along our borders; and the AIDS pandemic.

To expedite implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, we must therefore do the following: overcome financial, institutional and human problems; achieve true decentralization and closer cooperation between public institutions and civil society in Guinea; get women more involved in formulating development policy, in decision-making and in implementing national policies, programmes and projects; improve our system for the collection, processing and management of statistical data; and further strengthen partnerships with the various actors on the ground, especially non-governmental organizations. Clearly, the road ahead is long and arduous, so we stress that the advancement of women must be an integral part of overall development programmes.

We wish to emphasize the importance of involving women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, especially in our subregion, West Africa. For more than a decade, our country, the Republic of Guinea, has been surrounded by hotbeds of tension, including civil wars in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. Cruel emergency situations resulting from armed conflict have caused massive shifts of people into our country. Following the crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, our country has seen an unprecedented population explosion with the arrival of more than 800,000 refugees, 60 per cent of them women and children. Guinea is thus host to the largest number of refugees per capita in Africa: refugees today account for 10 per cent of the population of Guinea.

That situation has had an impact on our country's basic social infrastructure, on the functioning of our institutions and on the life of Guineans. Our country's involvement in the settlement of these conflicts has had a negative effect on development programmes, particularly those focusing on women and children. Since 1989, my country has budgeted more than $300 million for the restoration of peace, security and stability in West Africa.

The women of Guinea understand this and, through a variety of organizations, have been mobilizing to make their voices heard and to participate in the future of our country. At Conakry, in January 2000, the Network of Guinean Women, Ministers and Parliamentarians held a subregional conference of West African countries on the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Guinean women have also played an active role in meetings of women of the Mano River Union on resolving the conflict in Sierra

Leone and on possible intervention to prevent other conflicts.

I should like to take this opportunity to appeal to the international community to support my country's development programmes as well as our efforts to restore peace and security to West Africa.

I cannot conclude without extending my sincere gratitude to the international donor community for its support for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in our country. We hope that by the year 2005, we will have successfully implemented the forward-looking strategies of Nairobi.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the next speaker, may I remind delegates that the time limit for statements at this session is seven minutes.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Gloria Valerín, Minister for the Status of Women of Costa Rica.

Mrs. Valerín (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Five years ago, humankind took a firm and resolute step in the search for equity and equality between men and women by approving the Beijing Platform for Action. That step had historic global repercussions at both the international and the local level, where undeniable progress has been achieved.

At the international level, the Beijing Platform built a bridge between grand statements of principle and the development of concrete plans to achieve gender equity. Nationally, countries have moved beyond isolated, short-term and disjointed actions in favour of public policies with a gender focus. Such is the case in my country, Costa Rica.

Our achievements in developing public policies for gender equality in areas such as poverty, work, credit, health, adolescence, violence and political participation have become well known since Beijing. We are proud of having developed a national policy whose aim is to promote equal opportunities for girls, pregnant teenagers and mothers, and to guarantee the rights of minors.

The very serious problem of violence against women has warranted particular attention in our country. As a result, we have created a national system for monitoring and preventing family violence, which has yielded excellent results at both the inter-institutional and the inter-sectoral level.

Costa Rica's democracy is being broadened and improved through the political participation of women; at the same time, it provides indispensable support for maintaining and strengthening all of the victories achieved by women. Our electoral code has been reformed so as to ensure the participation of at least 40 per cent of women. Furthermore, we have ensured that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal will also apply this 40 per cent requirement to elective positions within parties in the local and legislative elections. Hence, with the elections in 2002, we will double the number of women in local government and in Congress.

The National Mechanism for Women has been in existence in my country for 25 years. I should therefore like to highlight the fact that it was the progressive and sustained impetus provided by the guidelines of Beijing that led to its transformation in 1998 into the National Institute for Women. The leading role and high-level influence of this high-ranking, modern organization has been strengthened by the designation of a Minister for Women's Affairs.

The State of Costa Rica has reaffirmed and strengthened its obligation to guarantee equal rights for men and women since 1990 through the law to promote the social equality of women. The progress achieved since then has made it possible for us to have a broad and coherent legal framework in order to support our gender-equality activities. In the past five years, we have succeeded in enacting important legal instruments. Among these, I should like to highlight legislation on domestic violence, sexual harassment and disability; laws against the sexual exploitation of children; a legal code for minors and adolescents; regulations relating to women living in poverty; laws to ensure special protection for pregnant women and nursing mothers; and, more generally, laws to ensure the rights of women to full health throughout their entire lives.

Costa Rica is standing by the commitment made by President Rodríguez to protect life from the time of conception and to oppose abortion, in keeping with our political Constitution and the culture of our people. Furthermore, the decisions of the constitutional court have clarified and reaffirmed the duty of institutions and of government to orient their actions and policies towards equality and gender equity.

A good example of the progress made in Costa Rica with regard to legal instruments for equality and

women's rights can be seen in the fact that we were one of the first countries to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The Republic's four branches of power participate to promote initiatives to advance gender equity: the recently created Special Standing Committee on Women of the Legislative Assembly; the People's Defender; the Ministerial and Municipal Departments for Women; and the Supreme Elections Tribunal and Committee on Family Violence of the Judiciary. Together with the National Institute of Women — the national mechanism — they constitute a set of bodies and competencies that coordinate efforts towards a common purpose.

It has not been easy, and it will not be easy in the future, to transform conditions for women or to overcome the disadvantages from which they suffer. We have started out on the long road, learning important lessons along the way, and I would like to highlight three of them.

We have learned that gender equity actions should not be limited to the national mechanism or to practical assistance. They must be part of a comprehensive public policy, involving all the areas within the competence of the State.

We have learned that it is imperative to develop institutional and budgetary capacities in order to guarantee the incorporation of a gender focus into all affairs of State and to ensure its application.

We have learned that transparent and respectful opportunities for debate and dialogue with the women's movement and civil society can ensure the sustainability of public policies that promote equality. From the lessons that we have learned over the past few years, we can look towards the future and see clearly the major challenges that lie ahead.

We must improve our information systems so as to make gender inequality and women's contribution to development clearer and more visible; to monitor the impact of public policies and legal progress; and to ensure that we are accountable to society, as we must be in a mature democracy.

We have to guarantee the full political participation of women in the highest decision-making spheres. This means that at the same time we have to create national mechanisms that allow access to those spheres and strengthen women's leadership capabilities. We have to help women have access to more and better employment opportunities. Despite the country's higher rate of school attendance for women than for men, there is still gender segmentation in professional and technical training. We want to promote the entry of women into the fields of science, technology and the arts.

One of the most pressing and difficult goals is to free women from the social and cultural constraints that assign to them the full responsibility for domestic and reproductive tasks. We have to stress medium- and long-term policies in order to overcome these constraints.

In summing up, I can affirm with certainty that in my country the theme of women is today a Government policy that has to be transformed into State policies. The commitment of all institutions of the State of Costa Rica in the systematic implementation of public policies with a gender focus, with a sense of process and a vision of the future, is just beginning.

Public policies for equality and gender equity will take on their full meaning when we succeed in giving the lives of women and men in our country the highest levels of quality, when their lives are longer, healthier, more productive and, above all, more pleasant and happier. That is why today, as yesterday, women in Costa Rica still want bread and roses.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Onechanh Thammavong, Vice-President of the National Assembly of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and President of the Lao Women's Union.

Mrs. Thammavong (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in Lao; English text provided by delegation*): It is indeed my great pleasure and honour to represent the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". Let me start by congratulating the President on his election to lead this important special session.

Since the Beijing World Conference on Women, the Party and the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic have attached great importance to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in

the 12 areas of concern. I would like to take this opportunity to present to this Assembly our achievements, the obstacles we have encountered and our future plan of action to promote the advancement and development of Lao women of all ethnic groups.

The Lao Women's Union is the national mechanism for the promotion of equal rights and the advancement of women. The Union has responsibility for overseeing, directly and indirectly, implementation of all the Government's policies and programmes relating to women's development and gender issues.

After five years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the results can be summarized as follows. In the field of poverty eradication, Lao women have developed their knowledge and abilities in planning, management, capital control and broad access to financial institutions. They are active in seeking credit and arranging credit groups in the banks and solving problems in many different spheres. In this way, their lives become better and more successful.

The health-care sector has been improved, the maternal and child mortality rates have decreased and the quality of life of mothers and children has gradually been enhanced. The Lao Women's Union and the Anti-AIDS National Committee have conducted training courses and have disseminated knowledge relating to the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

In May 1999, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic adopted the Population Development Policy, which emphasizes the importance and the needs of promoting the role and status of Lao women in the development process.

Lao women have become aware of their rights and obligations and are now better able than before to protect their rights and interests. Female victims are protected by laws, gender issues have been gradually recognized by society, and there are now more women in the judiciary — in the prosecutor's office, in the courts, among the judges and among the police.

The Lao Government and people have been the victims of war in the past, and this still continues to affect the life of the Lao people, especially women and children. The Lao Government therefore considers the creation of a peaceful environment crucial for the national social and economic development that would bring prosperity to Lao people of all ethnic groups.

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic provides assistance to the victims of war and of unexploded ordnance. Today our country has political stability, and the people have better opportunities for social and economic progress.

Lao women of all ethnic groups, in both urban and rural areas, have developed and upgraded their knowledge of how to protect the rights of women and children, gender issues and the application of new techniques in production, nutrition, health, education and increasing family income in order to improve their quality of life. Accordingly, the number of women entrepreneurs has increased in the business of national and international trade.

On the issue of violence against women, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has undertaken various activities in order to eliminate it, such as the following: comprehensive measures to improve and disseminate penal laws in order to reduce and eliminate violence against women, by organizing training programmes, disseminating knowledge about laws to the public and creating legal counselling offices; eliminating trafficking of women and children, fighting against prostitution and providing assistance to the victims of violence; and research into the causes of violence against women, as well as effective measures to prevent it.

At all levels, the number of female leaders has increased. For example, in the National Assembly, the percentage of female parliamentarians has risen from 9.4 per cent in 1992 to 21.2 per cent today. One woman has been elected Vice-President of the National Assembly, two are members of the Standing Committee and one is the president of the National Assembly Commission for ethnic affairs. In the Government Cabinet, two women have been appointed Vice-Ministers. Apart from this, one provincial governor and two chiefs of districts are women. This demonstrates the growing participation of women in political affairs.

The implementation of these activities has brought us multifaceted successes. However, the advancement and development of women have been thwarted by such obstacles as outdated traditions and conservative ideas. These are the main obstacles to progress for women. The issue of equal rights for women and men has not been addressed appropriately. There is a lack of highly qualified and competent women personnel. Moreover, budgetary resources for

women's development are inadequate, while transportation between rural and urban areas is still limited.

In line with our renovation policy and the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic is committed to systematic advancement and development for Lao women of all ethnic groups. In this regard, the Lao Government has approved a Lao women's development plan, which comprises four major programmes: promoting women's participation in economic development and poverty alleviation for Lao women; institutional strengthening and capacity-building programmes for the Lao Women's Union; promoting the advancement and protecting the legitimate rights and benefits of women and children; and improving the knowledge of Lao women about government and party policies and our national cultural heritage.

The Lao Women's Union has a major strategic responsibility for achieving the long-term human resource development goals of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and for enhancing the participation of Lao women at all levels of societal development, in particular at the grass roots level.

The main responsibility for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action lies with national Governments. However, in this undertaking, the developing countries, especially the least developed, are not in a position to fulfil this responsibility on their own. The international community has the duty to cooperate with and assist them in their efforts to achieve the objectives set forth in the Platform.

In conclusion, once again may I thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to speak and to share our experiences in this meeting. Let me wish this special session a successful completion.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Aisha Ismail, Minister for Women's Affairs and Youth Development of Nigeria.

Ms. Ismail (Nigeria): The Group of 77 and China, on whose behalf I am addressing this special session of the General Assembly, is indeed pleased to see Mr. Gurirab preside over this historic session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". With his wealth of experience and the outstanding leadership he has demonstrated over the years, particularly since the commencement of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the Group is confident that this historic special session of the General Assembly will be crowned with success.

Five years ago, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in China, representatives from 189 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. That was a demonstration of a reaffirmed international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women of the world. It represented a concerted effort to advance the global, regional and national agendas for the empowerment of women. This review conference presents us with an opportunity to share experiences and to identify areas of progress and challenges confronting us in the struggle for women's empowerment and gender equality.

For us in the developing countries, the implementation of the Platform for Action in practically all the critical areas of concern has been a remarkable experience. While progress has been recorded in certain areas, there have been difficulties in others. Let me, therefore, begin with a brief remark on our efforts.

For developing countries today, the quest for poverty eradication and improved education and health for women and girls remains a top priority. In pursuit of these goals, developing countries have reviewed and strengthened policies and programmes with a special focus on the needs of women.

The issue of violence against women has also received and continues to receive a lot of attention in many developing countries. There have been policy, legal and institutional reforms to tackle all forms of violence against women. The adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session is a landmark achievement. This will further enhance the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. In addition, there has been an increase in the participation and representation of women at the decision-making and political levels.

The implementation of the Platform for Action has facilitated gender mainstreaming policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels. These various initiatives contribute to the

achievement of the goals of gender equality, peace and development.

Despite these achievements, it is imperative for us to recognize that our destination is still considerably far away, for not only have new challenges emerged, but old obstacles still persist. Since Beijing, the world has witnessed a lot of radical transformations in the area of computer and information technology, and one word that captures that transformation is "globalization". Indeed, globalization has reduced the world to a global village, facilitating the rapid transfer of knowledge and massive cross-cultural interaction among people and broadening people's minds, thus creating a heterogeneous global community. Undoubtedly, globalization has opened up opportunities for the creation of more wealth and the improvement of social life in some parts of the world.

While the benefits of globalization have been recognized, the reality is that developing countries have been at a disadvantage. More importantly, however, for this session it is important to acknowledge that the negative impact of globalization is felt more by the women of the developing countries. It is therefore necessary to critically examine how the issue of globalization is impacting the empowerment of women in that world to enable the development of appropriate programmes and to harness the opportunities presented by this new trend.

In this connection, however, there is a need for the international community to recognize the basic fact that it is the inherent weakness of the economies and institutional structures of many developing countries that make it extremely difficult for them to cope with the forces of globalization. This inadequacy hampers the effective implementation of programmes and projects for the advancement of women in these societies. This makes it imperative for the international community to support their efforts at the national level to meet the challenges of a globalized economy. We must similarly act to strengthen international cooperation for development by ensuring the creation of an appropriate international environment supportive of sustainable and equitable growth for developing countries. This will facilitate and promote the effective implementation of the Platform for Action in general and the critical areas of concern in particular.

Further impediments to the global commitment to gender equality are the debt burden and the painful implementation of structural adjustment programmes, which hang like millstones around the necks of many countries in the developing world. In spite of the willingness and cooperation of some countries of the developed world to relieve or cancel bilateral debt through such initiatives such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, the debt burden of the developing world, particularly in Africa, remains very high.

Financial flows have been virtually at a standstill in recent years and the financial distress of individual countries has been further aggravated by stagnant export earnings as commodity prices continue to fall. As a result, most indebted countries are unable to fulfil commitments on their debt payments and debt servicing continues to cripple the economies of the indebted countries and to impoverish their people, disproportionately more so the women and their families.

Debt cancellation can release much-needed vital resources and enable developing countries to commence the process of rehabilitating the destroyed social sector. Freedom from the debt burden will provide the means to help provide basic social services to the people. In addition, most developing countries carry the burden of a weak health sector, characterized by inadequate services. This is due, among other things, to a low capacity for adequate investment in health care in general. The total budget of developing countries in the health sector is not equal to 10 per cent of the overall budget of one developed country. Given this situation, developing countries not only have to cope with killer diseases such as malaria, typhoid, cholera and others that still ravage our population, but also have been devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This crisis is threatening to reverse our modest gains in the field of human resources development. Certainly, in the face of such a grim situation, debt cancellation at this point in time becomes the right of the poor, so that vital resources can be released to redress a critical situation in a critical area of human survival.

In the overall struggle for gender equality and the advancement of women, we must acknowledge the contributions of, and pay tribute to, the numerous non-governmental organizations and civil society groups around the world. They have played a prominent role as one of the formidable driving forces behind the struggle for gender equality and the advancement of women. They have also been

instrumental in moving the continuing debates on gender, development and peace to the top of the agenda at the national and international levels. Their untiring efforts in making information available, changing individual attitudes and setting the agenda for public dialogue have been crucial to integrating women's issues into the mainstream of the development discourse. These organizations have truly empowered people to effect changes in their lives. The challenge before us is to continue to expand and strengthen the cooperative links with civil society to advance the status of women.

We are united against the horrendous crime of trafficking in women and children, which today is universally acknowledged as a crime against humanity. We are united in our abhorrence of conflicts that target women and children. We are also committed to justice for women and for all, at the national, regional and international levels.

In conclusion, let me, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reiterate that we remain committed to implementing the Platform for Action. We will continue to advance the agenda to which the world is committed. We therefore look forward to the adoption at this special session of further strategic initiatives to advance gender equality and promote justice, development and peace in the new millennium.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Christopher Matumbike, Vice-Minister of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Matumbike (Zimbabwe): Allow me to associate my delegation with the congratulations already addressed to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab upon his election to the demanding post of the presidency of the Beijing + 5 review conference. In view of his wealth of experience, we hope to work fruitfully and successfully under his guidance in search of mutually acceptable decisions on the complex issues of gender equality, development and peace. Needless to say, he can count on the Zimbabwe delegation for support in discharging his duties. We fervently hope that this conference, besides enlightening and creating awareness among the misinformed, will also provide information on the progress made so far by various countries in their endeavours to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Indeed, this theme has attracted significant attention and given rise to discourse in various forums at the national, subregional, regional and international levels. It is pleasing to note that today we are gathered here to take stock of achievements in the area of gender equality and development.

Like most other countries, Zimbabwe acknowledges that any meaningful development is unlikely as long as gender inequalities are not addressed. The lack of equal access to natural resources and opportunities negatively affects the social and economic development of women.

I now wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the Beijing Platform for Action, agreed upon at the Fourth World Conference on Women, and the subsequent plans of action drawn up by Governments. Zimbabwe has drawn up comprehensive programmes to address the critical areas of concern as identified at Beijing. Zimbabwe, in partnership with civic and other non-governmental organizations, recognized the need for this partnership to ensure sustainable development and the attainment of gender equality. While Zimbabwe has registered significant achievements, it has not yet overcome the barriers standing in the way of attaining gender equality. However, great strides have been made through the improvement of legal instruments in most sectors affecting the female gender.

Agriculture is the backbone of Zimbabwe's economy, contributing about 17 per cent of the gross domestic product. Women constitute about 51 per cent of the population of Zimbabwe, of which about 86 per cent live in the rural areas. It is estimated that women account for 70 per cent of the agricultural labour force in Zimbabwe. Female-headed households make up the majority of the rural poor. Improving conditions in the rural areas through redistribution of land and ownership of land by women will go a long way towards poverty alleviation, thereby creating a better and healthier nation while addressing principles of equality. The current Land Reform and Resettlement Phase II policy framework of 1998 identifies the objective of the programme as the resettlement of families in a gender-sensitive manner.

The resettlement programme has been and will continue to be implemented through various resettlement models. Among the constraints women face in Zimbabwe is limited access to technology

skills, credit, information skills and other supportive requisites, as well as economic disabilities.

Most development programmes have made a few strides in recognizing women in their own right with regard to land redistribution, agricultural training and access to credit. However, in order for women to have full recognition there is a need for increased efforts in lobbying and for their participation in all economic reform programmes. What is important to note is the fact that women are eligible for agricultural land schemes in the same manner as their male counterparts.

The Government of Zimbabwe is making efforts to ensure that land is distributed equally and fairly to all those in need of it. Land is money, and money is land. Therefore, poverty eradication among women can be achieved only if resources are shared equally, to the benefit of women. Women's access to land will grossly improve their economic empowerment, which is globally a critical area for women.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme has also been introduced to eradicate poverty and directly support and sustain livelihood initiatives in disadvantaged communities, focusing on women and other vulnerable groups. It also emphasizes employment creation and self-reliance programmes.

In spite of the fact that access to credit is one of the key elements that empower women and enable them to take advantage of economic responsibilities, credit institutions rarely lend to women since women do not have collateral. In an effort to overcome this problem, women in Zimbabwe have mobilized to form saving clubs, credit cooperatives and village banks governed by the communities themselves. This is one way of ensuring that appropriate decisions are made for communities. Efforts are under way towards the establishment of a women's bank through the mobilization of funds to boost the capital base of the project.

In an effort to strengthen the national machinery and ensure effective contributions to the Plan of Action, the Government of Zimbabwe recognized that there was the need for a strong mechanism, as well as the need to popularize the global Platform for Action. With this realization, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a process of strengthening the institutional mechanism through the establishment and formulation of the gender focal points in coordination with ministries and departments in Zimbabwe.

It has made great strides in fostering the formal education system, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. What has not been adequately addressed are the efforts to change the attitudinal and cultural factors which discriminate against the girl child and women, in the context of which attempts to foster the education system are taking place. More attention is being directed at addressing negative contextual factors, such as the socialization process of the girl child and negative attitudes towards the girl child at home, in the community and at school.

While there has been marked improvement in retention rates in primary schools, there are glaring gender disparities in secondary and tertiary education. Notwithstanding these gender disparities, Zimbabwe has improved in terms of retention figures for girls at all levels of the education system as a result of the affirmative action programmes put in place, particularly in tertiary education.

The Government of Zimbabwe has put in place a gender curriculum that favours the girl child and includes technical subjects such as carpentry. The United Nations Children's Fund and the Canadian International Development Agency are the main sponsors of this project. The long-term goal of this project is to create an enabling environment for the girl child's equitable access to participation and achievement in education. The project focuses on changing the attitudes, values and perceptions of a variety of stakeholders who play a role in the girl child's education.

The subject of women and health is a priority for the Government of Zimbabwe. The Government recognizes that good health is fundamental to a fulfilling life, and it is committed to ensuring that women have access to a high standard of appropriate, affordable and effective health-care services with an emphasis on preventive care and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Tremendous strides have been made in the extension of health-care programmes and facilities to women in both the urban and rural areas. However, in recent years these achievements have come under increased pressure due to the realities of financial austerity and inflation, expanding population and illness related to HIV/AIDS.

While the concurrent crises of AIDS and the economic decline are critical challenges, it is important to keep achievements in mind. Successful primary

health care reduced the infant mortality rate from 100 to 50 between 1980 and 1988, and the reduction continued into the 1990s.

The country has made tremendous progress in the area of the mortality rate; it fell from 60 per cent in 1994 to 42 per cent in 1997. At present, one in every three women uses modern birth control; this is one of the highest rates of contraceptive practice in Africa. This allows women to control their own fertility has contributed to dramatically reduced infant mortality rates. It is important to note that 90 per cent of pregnant women receive antenatal care, three quarters of it provided by trained personnel. According to the 1999 annual benchmark report, the prenatal mortality rate is on the decline: it was 43.8 in 1996, 41.4 in 1997 and 40.1 in 1998. Eighty-five per cent of the population is located within eight kilometres of a health facility, and ratio of population to facility is around 8,000 to 1.

In comparative terms, health remains a priority of the Government in terms of public expenditure. The year 2000 is seeing a decline in the health budget, but this has been cushioned by the introduction of the AIDS levy. The HIV/AIDS infection rate has reached a level that affects the morbidity, mortality and demographic profile. In 1998, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS estimated that 25.8 per cent of people in the country aged between 15 and 49 were infected. The impact of this on women's health cannot be underestimated. AIDS is responsible for the highest proportion of the national burden of disease. A 1999 report indicated that HIV-related diseases may account for as much as 40 per cent of Zimbabwe's national health burden. As a result, adult mortality has increased markedly.

While the Government of Zimbabwe is fully committed to promoting gender equality, the prevailing macro-economic situation has had a negative impact on the efforts that are being made. The Government of Zimbabwe has been forced to work with limited human and financial resources, making it difficult to efficiently and effectively implement the Platform for Action.

The Acting President: Let me once again remind members that speakers' time is limited to seven minutes.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Andrée Lahoud, Chairperson of the delegation of Lebanon.

Mrs. Lahoud (Lebanon) (*spoke in French*): I would like at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for his interest in the convening of this special session, the major focus of which is the development of mankind and society in the twenty-first century. There are three challenges us facing our modern society: growth, so that every individual may live in dignity; sharing, to eliminate inequity; and development, including the development of intelligence, freedom and knowledge.

The roots of underdevelopment are not solely economic; they are also cultural and political. Great segments of our populations are illiterate and have no access to education. Humans oppress other humans for economic, political, religious and racial reasons. The gap between rich and poor countries is widening, and the situation of the latter is now disastrous. The gap is exacerbated by inequality between men and women.

We cannot and must not be apathetic in the face of this situation. We must address the core of the problem; we must change our attitudes, our behaviour and our policies. Our response to pervasive underdevelopment must involve solidarity: that is the true path to the development that is key to peace among nations. The international community understands this, as we can see from the growing number of private organizations founded in recent years. Some of these are global in scope, and almost all respond with great care and laudable objectivity to international events.

But solidarity can yield results only if we all acknowledge the need for equality, justice and freedom. Women have a paramount part to play in social and political life. Men and women have different, equal and complementary natures and abilities; hence, we cannot build a good society without the active participation of women.

Against that background, Lebanon's National Commission on Women has prepared a plan of action in the context of our overall State strategy aimed at ensuring equality before the law for women and men, and at enhancing women's role in all of our development programmes. Lebanese law guarantees women's rights, but it is applied somewhat unequally,

depending on the woman's environment and level of education.

Lebanese women have suffered enormously from decades of Israeli aggression, occupation and war. Mothers have lost children, wives their husbands; some widows, invalids, prisoners and displaced persons have had to care for their families alone, and many have, of course, been obliged to abandon their studies. That has affected every part of Lebanon; the enormity of the exodus has left a trail of death and destruction throughout the country. Lebanese women have been actively involved in liberating the occupied territory. Now they must make an even greater effort to rebuild our country so that the wounds of war may be healed.

To that end, our National Commission and a number of non-governmental organizations are organizing campaigns for the education of girls and women with respect to playing an active role. But the needs are enormous.

But the needs are great. That is why, in conclusion, I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the disastrous and wretched situation of the people in southern Lebanon, now that it has been released from the Israeli yoke. Our villages have been destroyed; there are no longer any water; there are no longer any roads, electricity, industry or agriculture. Most of those returning home have found their homes destroyed. I appeal to the conscience of the people of the world so that they will organize, as soon as possible, considerable and prompt assistance to ensure, that the suffering in southern Lebanon does not lead us into further war and disaster.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rashid Alimov, Chairman of the delegation of Tajikistan.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): The delegation of the Republic of Tajikistan fully shares the assessment, expressed here in this General Assembly Hall, that the twenty-third special session — the culmination of an enormous amount of work to analyse and implement the Beijing Platform for Action — is our common response to the new challenges of today as we demonstrate our single will and full resolve to find the most effective way of ensuring that women can live in dignity and enjoy an improved social and economic status in the twenty-first century.

Of course, this is no easy task. It is a long-term endeavour that means overcoming current obstacles and requires enormous political will. Clearly, the task is complicated by fundamental changes occurring in the world today, including globalization. In the five years since Beijing, the world has been unable to respond adequately to the new challenges posed by civil wars, inter-ethnic conflicts, international terrorism, organized crime, drug and arms trafficking, the AIDS epidemic and other dangerous infectious diseases. The saddest fact is that we have not been able to find a way of resolving the problem of poverty, which, overall is still increasing rather than decreasing. All of these horrible phenomena taking place today affect millions of women throughout the world and constitute an additional burden on their already fragile shoulders.

Tajikistan has suffered the horrors of civil war and is still suffering from problems associated with it. The five-year-long inter-Tajik conflict has brought untold suffering and damage to the economy and to society. The damage has been estimated at $7 billion. This is a serious blow to our national economy and to Tajik society. The key link in our societal chain — the family — has been affected, and the burden is being borne by the most vulnerable groups: women and children. There are 20,000 widows and 55,000 orphans in Tajikistan — the sad consequence of the fratricidal war. Just as we were beginning to move towards democracy and progress, the conflict set us back several years.

Today, there is a clear understanding within our society that a limit has been reached in political and social upheaval. With the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, we have put an end to a tragic chapter in the history of independent Tajikistan. Our young sovereign State has now arrived at a new, creative stage. With international support, our Government is taking steps to overcome the consequences of the civil war, and we are now reaping the first fruits of our effort at economic and social development. The restoration of peace and stability in Tajikistan has opened up new opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of our social policy and making it more targeted and focused.

Despite the difficult financial and economic situation, our Government is trying to increase salaries, provide assistance to students and index pensions.

Significant resources are being given to refugees and displaced persons, particularly families that have suffered as a result of the conflict. We are trying to reconstruct houses, bridges and roads and to rebuild the social and industrial infrastructure.

All of these measures are having a positive impact on the situation of women, who form the majority of our population. Pursuant to the Beijing decisions, in Tajikistan we are continuing to implement measures to ensure equality for women and men. Our new constitution, adopted after a nationwide referendum, guarantees equal rights for men and women. Legal, social and economic equality for women is enshrined in our labour law and in the codes governing marriage and the family and employment and education. The code governing health devotes special attention to that issue. Women now have free choice in the area of reproductive health. This has resulted in a decrease in maternal death from abortions from 30 per cent to 11 per cent.

In our country, we are now working on a national plan to enhance the status of women for the period 1998 to 2005. It focuses on the 12 main areas of concern so as to enhance the role of women in our society and improve their well-being. We are now taking a special approach. The commission responsible for implementing the plan of action for women is headed by a woman and has become the driving force and a catalyst in introducing new approaches to gender issues.

We are continuing to involve more women at the State level in Tajikistan, and women's participation at the management level currently stands at 16 per cent. Women's enormous intellectual capacity and potential in professional activities and business is being developed, and this can be seen particularly at the local level. There are four female chairpersons of local governments, and 95 per cent of the deputies at the local government level are women. In Tajikistan today, it is quite common now to see a woman deputizing in the Government, acting as vice-chairperson in Parliament or heading or deputizing in a major company. Women are becoming more actively involved in managing government and in the social and political life of the country. All of this is due, to a significant extent, to the efforts of our President, Mr. Rakhmonov.

Women are active in the restoration of peace and concord in Tajikistan, and, together with men, they are involved in post-conflict peace-building. Legal guarantees have been given, and the political situation is now stable. The Government is interested in developing the political activity of women. Today, there is a new attitude throughout our society. In the past five years, we have established 54 new women's non-governmental organizations, which are actively working together with the Government. Many of them are operating tax free, and I should like to point out that 35 per cent of all the non-governmental organizations operating in our country are headed by women.

The Government's policy of creating a socially oriented market economy has opened up new opportunities for women. In conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, and with the aim of providing greater economic freedom for women and developing their full potential, programmes for financing women's entrepreneurship have been developed and are being implemented. Another programme is being implemented for providing microcredit to women and households headed by women. These and other measures by the Government of Tajikistan are aimed at combining efforts to make complex decisions on how to improve the standard of living, first of all by determining the full magnitude of the problem of poverty.

Over 80 per cent of the Tajik population lives below the poverty line, and there is a disturbing tendency towards the feminization of poverty in our country. The problem is aggravated by the fact that most families have many children and women have to take on the traditional duties of child care in addition to their economic activity. The difficult economic situation, the destruction of the former traditional way of life, the low level of education and the impossibility of finding a job in one's own field of specialization have led some women to reject their old standards and values. Unfortunately, criminal groups are now quite often drawing women into illegal activities, particularly in the drug trade, which is becoming a fast-growing nucleus of the underground economy of Central Asia. We have to unite our efforts to combat this worldwide scourge.

Another major concern of the Tajik Government is the health of the population, and particularly of women and children. The civil war devastated our health sector, and many qualified medical personnel

left the country. There was a particularly difficult situation in the southern and eastern parts of the country, where as a result of fighting, many hospitals were fully or partially destroyed, and all the medical equipment was irretrievably lost.

As a result, the number of births taking place at home has gone up to 30 per cent, 90 per cent of which take place without the attendance of medical personnel. As a result, every tenth newborn dies, and every fourth newborn suffers from various medical problems.

The difficult economic situation and the lack of adequate nutrition has led to a 60 per cent incidence of anaemia in Tajik women of childbearing age, and in recent years there has been an increase of 150 per cent in the incidence of this ailment in young girls.

In order to resolve these problems, the Government has developed a national programme to combat anaemia. We hope that the donor countries and international organizations will continue to give us the necessary support in solving this and other urgent problems relating to women.

The conflict in Tajikistan has caused significant damage to the environment and to agriculture, which leads us once again to consider the problem of the population's access to potable water. Our mountainous region, which acts as a water tower for all of Central Asia does not experience water shortages as such. The problem is in getting sufficient quality and quantity of clean drinking water. There is a well-known statistic that half of the population of the world lives in unhealthy conditions because of water pollution, which causes over 5 million deaths and 3 billion cases of sickness every year. Women and children are particularly susceptible to infectious diseases. In order to draw the attention of the world community to this global problem, Tajikistan has proposed that the year 2003 be declared the international year for fresh water. We hope that our initiative will be supported by Member States and that an appropriate resolution can be adopted at the forthcoming fifty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Tajik people's traditional system of values has always attached special importance and honour to women. Since time immemorial we have had a tradition of great respect for women as mothers, for women in charge of the home, for the peace, love, well-being, creativity and prosperity that we associate with women. While firmly supporting the principles and spirit of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of Tajikistan sees its main task as creating all the necessary conditions for strengthening and developing the potential of every human being and eliminating all kinds of gender inequality. We have the potential needed to develop a society of equal rights and equal opportunities, embodying the interests of both men and women.

The peace and stability that have been restored in our country offer assurance that Tajikistan will move towards sustainable development and creativity into the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Senior Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Community Development of Singapore.

Mrs. Yu-Foo (Singapore): It gives me great pleasure to participate in this special session of the General Assembly. The Government of Singapore remains committed to achieving the goals set by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We hope this consultative process will provide new insights and achieve concrete progress on the advancement of women in the new millennium.

Five years ago, 189 countries adopted by consensus the 12 critical areas outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action and pledged to achieve gender equality. I thank the Assembly for granting me the privilege of sharing with it how Singapore has transformed rhetoric into reality in showing our support for this global enterprise.

The Beijing Platform for Action has served as a reference point in the continuing process of formulating Singapore's policies. I am pleased to report that many recommendations have been implemented and that progress is continuing.

For example, in the area of women and violence, Singapore amended the Women's Charter to further enhance the protection of our women from violence and expand the legal rights to protection of married women. Our penal code was also amended in 1998 to enhance the protection of migrant domestic workers, who are mostly women.

With regard to women and human rights, Singapore has adopted an equal opportunity policy grounded on the principle of meritocracy. This principle underpins the planning and implementation of

our public policies. Singapore women have equal access to basic soci. ! services, including education and health.

When Singapore gained independence in 1965, infant mortality was high, the literacy rate was low and a large proportion of the population was without proper housing. We have reduced our maternal mortality rate per thousand live and still births to below 1 per cent. Since 1995, our female infant mortality rate has hovered at around 5 per thousand resident live births.

The literacy rate of Singapore women aged 15 years and older continues to improve, rising to 89 per cent in 1998. Today, females in universities and polytechnics constitute almost half of total enrolment. More females are entering traditionally male-dominated domains. For example, in 1994, only one in eight engineering students was female. This rose to one in three in 1998. Ownership of housing by women climbed from 48 per cent in 1992 to 51 per cent this year.

We recognize that working women face many challenges, balancing their multiple roles as workers, mothers, wives and daughters. Hence, generous tax incentives for working women have been introduced and employers are encouraged to grant special leave to working women whose children fall sick. The Government provides childcare subsidies for working mothers who place their children in childcare centres. Subsidized childcare places grew from 15,200 in 1990 to 44,000 in 1999. These measures have enabled Singaporean women to fulfil their ambitions to have both career and family life. They also increased the female labour participation rate from 40 per cent in 1990 to 53 per cent in 1999.

Not only are there more women in employment and in fields traditionally the preserve of men, but more women are also earning higher pay. In 1994, only 18 per cent of working women, or about 113,400, earned more than S$2,000 per month. Within five years, this number rose by 146 per cent.

One of the Beijing Platform for Action concerns is women and decision-making. The proportion of women holding professional, technical, managerial and executive positions has increased from 29 per cent to 35 per cent over the past five years. Women have also contributed significantly to community and national development. Last year, 42 per cent of the recipients of our National Day Awards were women. These Awards are the highest form of recognition in Singapore.

More women are now occupying higher positions of authority. In 1994, there were no women judges in the High Court and only 18 per cent of the Subordinate Court judges were women. Since 1999, two female High Court Judges have been appointed and 44 per cent of Subordinate Court judges are now women. Last year, the first woman commander of a police division, the first woman permanent secretary in the Civil Service and the first woman to head an information technology statutory board were appointed.

In 1999, the Ministry of Manpower, the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation issued the Tripartite Guidelines on Non-Discriminatory Job Advertisements to educate and assist employers. The proportion of job advertisements stipulating discriminatory criteria, including gender, dropped from 32 per cent in January 1999 to below 1 per cent this year.

Exciting new opportunities await Singapore's women as we move towards a knowledge-based economy. Technology will help women to be in a better position to help themselves. For example, the Singapore Professional and Business Women's Association launched FemmE-Net in October 1999 as a resource for Asian women entrepreneurs. As self-actualization increasingly comes within the reach of many women, men and women alike must continue to exercise sound fundamental values that strengthen family and social cohesion. In Singapore, we see a continuing need for individuals, the community and the Government to work in partnership to improve the quality of life of women, men, and our families.

To demonstrate our commitment to the advancement of women, Singapore acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women shortly after we adopted the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. An inter-ministerial committee was then set-up to oversee the implementation of the Convention. I am pleased to report that Singapore's initial report was submitted to the United Nations in November last year.

To conclude, negotiations on the outcome document to be adopted at this special session have been challenging. My delegation would like to place on record our appreciation for the hard work done by the Preparatory Committee and by all negotiating partners

in reaching a new set of action plans to take us into the next decade. The new document from this session should complement our respective countries' efforts, where relevant. It should encourage meaningful cooperation between Governments and civil society. It is in this spirit that my Government renews its commitment to the Beijing + 5 process.

The Acting President: I should like to advise representatives that, at the pace at which we are proceeding, we will not be able to finish in time for this morning's meeting and therefore two speakers will have to be carried over to the afternoon meeting.

May I therefore implore speakers to limit the time of their speeches to the seven minutes allowed here in the General Assembly.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Guadalupe Gomez-Maganda, General Coordinator of the National Commission for Women of Mexico.

Mrs. Gomez-Maganda (Mexico): The Mexican delegation congratulates Mr. Gurirab and wishes him the greatest success during this special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

Our delegation is composed of legislators, public servants and women of civil society, who reflect the plurality of our nation. Five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, the Government of Mexico is represented in this Assembly to ratify its commitment to the ongoing implementation of the Platform for Action and to speak of the achievements attained towards the common objective of improving the social condition of women.

We have undertaken many actions, among which are enhanced legislation on behalf of women and the building of an institutional framework to embody the commitment of the public power towards gender equity.

In 1996, the President of the Republic, Mr. Ernesto Zedillo, instituted the National Programme for Women, a preceptive government instrument that defines commitments and actions to guarantee the full exercise by girls and women of their human rights and the benefits of development, under conditions equal to those enjoyed by men. It is helping to translate into reality the principle of legal equality for men and women, as set forth in article 4 of our Constitution. The creation of the National Commission for Women, a body responsible for coordinating and following up the Programme, was a step forward and has fostered the incorporation of the gender approach in public policies.

At the federal legislative level, we have established Commissions on gender and equity and a bicameral Commission in the Women's Parliament, which have had a decisive influence in the setting up of a legal framework with a gender perspective free of discriminatory provisions against women.

In addition to these achievements, the Commission has advocated the creation of similar bodies at the State government and congress level the enacting of laws, and coordinated action to promote the status of women.

Due to the broad convergence between the areas of special concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the guidelines of our own national programme, I will highlight but a few of the most relevant actions that have been carried out in compliance with the Platform.

In order to give greater visibility to the status of women and to their contributions to development, statistics are needed that are broken down by gender; we have compiled them. We also have a system of gender indicators that has enabled us to closely monitor the status of Mexican women.

In the educational sector, we have eliminated inequities with respect to access to schooling and the attendance of girls and young women. We have also opposed sexist content and attitudes in teaching, devoting particular attention to rural and indigenous women as well as marginalized urban women, many of whom are illiterate.

In the area of health care, progress can be seen in the higher life expectancy for Mexican women: 77 years of age. We have instituted a national health card for women, which has made it possible to provide them with lifelong health care. We have made headway in the prevention and treatment of cervical, uterine and breast cancer, and we have expanded family-planning and reproductive health services. Special attention has also been given to the prevention and management of pregnancy among adolescents.

In order to deal with the problem of poverty, we have promoted productive activities for women, in particular for rural and indigenous women, to whom

we have devoted resources at least equal to those allocated to men.

The process of modernization in my country and the rising educational level among women has given them access to better and more numerous jobs. We are also assisting rural women's agricultural groups by providing loans and diversifying their activities.

In the area of human rights, I would like to highlight our compliance with international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Belém do Pará, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, whose Optional Protocol Mexico was one of the first countries to sign. We must also stress the reforms made to our Constitution aimed at helping crime victims and ensuring respect for the rights of children, who are already benefiting from a law on the protection of the rights of children and adolescents.

Legal spouses and partners of female State workers now receive medical care, and we have also instituted sanctions against domestic violence.

Laws require public policies that guarantee compliance with them. That is why we have developed a national programme against domestic violence, which, along with investigations, has contributed to raising awareness of, and preventing, this very severe social problem. We have also promoted the training and sensitization of those involved in the justice field, which has led to better care for victims of violence.

Despite the fact that women's involvement in the public sphere has increased - for the first time, a woman holds the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the number of female members of Parliament and senators has increased — genuine access by women to decision-making positions still remains to be attained. These and other actions, achieved thanks to the combined efforts of Government and civil society, are detailed in the report we have circulated to delegations.

It is clear that the situation of Mexican women has improved substantially. Nevertheless, we are still far from achieving the objectives we have set for ourselves. We will have to step up our efforts to reduce maternal mortality and the vulnerability of poor indigenous women and disabled and elderly women, as well as broaden opportunities for women in the labour market and eliminate the legal obstacles that still infringe on their rights.

We must also stress a more equitable distribution of domestic and family responsibilities. We will continue to strive to implement affirmative action measures in order to guarantee that the attention given to women's affairs and to gender equity becomes State policy.

Mexico's ratification of the Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women has encouraged our Government and all Mexican women to continue the quest for equity and equal opportunity. The goal we have set for ourselves has been a key catalyst for the progress we have achieved. Five years after Beijing, the balance sheet is generally positive. Institutions that promote the advancement of have been consolidated, as has the commitment of the State and society as a whole to follow the path of equity and gender equality.

We will continue our efforts to forge a more democratic nation, based on justice, with the full and equal participation of all Mexican men and women.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Amelou Benítez-Reyes, Chairperson, National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women of the Philippines.

Mrs. Amelou Benítez-Reyes (Philippines): My delegation appreciates all of the efforts undertaken in preparation for this conference. With mixed feelings of fulfilment and anxiety, my delegation is pleased to report the Philippines' assessment of the achievements registered and the obstacles encountered in the pursuit of the many commitments we have made.

Our assessment, made jointly with the Philippine Non-Governmental Organization Score Board, has shown critical areas that require further attention by the Government, through the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, in partnership with line agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Since Beijing, the lives of Filipino women have been seriously affected by the financial crisis that hit the region. The advent of globalization and its negative consequences have exacerbated the pressures we are experiencing and affected our ability to effectively implement the commitments made at the Conference. What has enabled us to cope with all of the demands of a growing population is the Philippines' commitment to strengthening the national machinery to advance the status of women — the first in Asia — which was

established in 1975, predating the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979. Against the backdrop of the harsh realities that confronted us during that period, the Philippine Government, together with non-governmental organizations and key institutions of civil society, endeavoured to honour its commitments, registering the following achievements.

First, the Philippine Gender-Responsive Planning programme facilitated the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with six-year implementation schedules coinciding with the Government's medium-term plan. This has served as an operational guide for the Government and all of its institutional partners in implementing the strategic objectives of the Philippine commitments to the Beijing Platform: an integrated approach to gender, poverty and governance.

The planning and implementation of gender-responsive programmes and projects has been integrated into the roles and responsibilities of public officials and their staff through individual performance contracts.

Because some plans failed for lack of resources, the Philippine Government took the bold step of initiating affirmative action in the area of budgeting, spearheaded by Senator Shahani since 1975, by legislating a gender and development budget policy through the annual Appropriations Act. This Act directs all Government institutions to allocate no less than 5 percent of their total budgets to implement the development plan for women's empowerment. Presently 134 Government agencies have complied with this budget policy, from 69 in 1998.

We have also initiated a gender audit to address the barriers, obstacles and lack of access to resources for women's empowerment. The gender and development focal points were also organized into a nationwide network for capability-building, gender-responsive planning, budgeting and monitoring. Women's contributions and achievements in various areas of our national life have been systematically recorded as "Herstory", a tool for gender planning in the absence of gender statistics.

Modules and tools for gender mainstreaming at the national and local levels have been adopted with a view to setting up local commissions on women in 79 provinces and 1,600 municipalities.

Private and public colleges and universities are encouraged to provide certification for different levels of gender and development training: advocacy, gender focal persons, gender experts and gender specialists.

The Civil Service Commission has implemented gender and development principles in the recruitment, placement and retention of Government personnel by instituting a quota of 30 per cent in senior positions in the civil service.

We have also instituted legislation at the national level. The Philippines initiated resolutions on migrant workers, rural women, women in indigenous communities, women with disabilities and older women. In the health agenda, we have placed special emphasis on mental health for special groups. The Philippines also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and Congress has begun the process of its ratification.

At the national level most of the laws with discriminatory provisions have been amended, in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Now new bills are subjected to gender analysis prior to enactment.

My delegation feels very strongly about three priority concerns: migrant workers, trafficking in women and children and violence against women. We join delegations from countries with large populations of migrant workers in seeking ways to provide for their return and reintegration into our societies.

The practice of mail-order brides has been outlawed. Recently, with the support of the United States Government, the Philippines hosted the Asian Regional Initiative Against Trafficking in Women and Children to adopt programmes of action for a lasting solution to the problem of trafficking that includes prevention, protection, prosecution and integration. This afternoon a panel will report on these to the United Nations.

In response to cases of violence against women, 1,400 women's desks have been established in police precincts. Family courts have been established as well to deal with family-related cases of violence.

We have adopted a progressive law on rape that took nine long years to enact. It covers a wide definition of rape, imposes stiffer penalties for

offenders and recognizes the existence of marital rape. Sexual harassment has also been outlawed.

Poverty remains the single biggest factor that limits women's opportunities. Our Government has strengthened women's perspectives within the national anti-poverty programme of the Estrada Administration by including representation of the women's sector at the policy level. This has helped vulnerable women's groups that are included among the programme targets.

Recently, we launched a 4 billion peso loan for women entrepreneurs in order to provide women with access to credit, training, markets, information and technology. A national vocational training centre for women was established and offers regular courses on entrepreneurship in non-traditional occupations.

Recognizing that regional and economic policies impact differently on women and men, we have pursued the development of a framework for the integration of women in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, after holding a ministerial meeting on women. This framework was adopted by the APEC leaders in 1998 and led to the organization of an ad hoc group on gender information. The Philippines has been designated the Project Overseer, to conduct gender information sessions in all the various APEC working groups.

The Philippine Government will reiterate its commitment to the Platform for Action and Optional Protocol by establishing the Philippine Development Authority for Women, which will expand the functions of the national machinery from policy review and formulation to coordinating the implementation of plans and programmes and setting up local offices in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and private corporations.

It is our vision to institute an effective accountability system through the Gender Mainstreaming Management System and a better way of identifying the programmes and projects for women's empowerment and gender equity in the entire budget and bureaucracy.

To fill the gaps in and overcome obstacles to the effective implementation of the Platform, we shall explore with foreign donors and private benefactors the setting up of a 1 billion peso trust fund, the earnings of which should assist the women's movement and accelerate implementation of the Platform for Action.

We wish to get Members' support for fast-tracking State actions beyond Beijing + 5. With the extensive experience and insight gained by national machineries, we are proposing a regional mechanism for South-South cooperation that will be able to establish systematic collaboration and exchanges of experience among national machineries.

Finally, we recommend a global fund for millennium women. Unless new sources of funds and resources are made available, the prospects for achieving the objectives of the Platform for Action within the next five years remain dim. We propose a $1 billion fund, to be set up by a United Nations agency, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank or another financial institution, or through national machineries authorized by their Governments to lend at a very low interest rate, for the continued implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Our work is far from over. Women's leadership in the new millennium should manifest unique qualities, strength, compassion and faith, and particularly caring, healing and nurturing. These are essential to finding a social paradigm that will bring about peace rather than violence and aggression, and a better life for all.

Let us look at the outcome document as an opportunity and a challenge for all of us to translate it into a policy of governance that combines women's potentials and needs. After all, effective governance without gender perspective is no governance at all.

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Ruth Cardoso, President of the Council of Comunidade Solidária of Brazil.

Mrs. Cardoso (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): May I begin by congratulating the President on his election to lead this special session and wish him every success in the work ahead. I am especially pleased to once again convey the commitment of the Brazilian Government to protecting and fostering women's rights. This presents us with an opportunity to forge a new agenda for gender equality, one that is in keeping with contemporary society and that makes social development and world peace in the twenty-first century its highest priorities.

Brazil took an active part in the regional preparatory meeting and is a party to the Lima Consensus. The Brazilian Government wishes to underscore its support for and firm commitment to the

principles and decisions adopted by the international community at Beijing.

For Brazil, the Beijing Platform for Action enshrines an ideal and a set of innovative guidelines that have exercised a decisive and motivating influence on Brazilian society as a whole. Government support, the responsiveness and dedication shown by our congresswomen, the active and organized action of women and the crucial role of the media — these have all been influential in enhancing the quality of life for Brazilian women.

An important instrument in this process has been the implementation of the so-called equality strategies drawn up by the National Council for Women's Rights, together with federal guidelines aimed at translating the Beijing recommendations and adapting them to the reality of the Brazilian context.

The same conviction that motivated the Government and civil society to ensure that women effectively enjoy full civil rights in Brazil has guided the entire preparatory process, leading up to Brazil's participation in Beijing + 5. In October 1999, the Brazilian Government set up the National Committee, over which I preside, and which brings together representatives from Government, Congress and civil society. This Committee has sought to identify Brazilian specificities within the critical areas of the Platform for Action. It has also undertaken studies and research projects to help flesh out Brazil's answers to the questionnaire presented by the United Nations. Furthermore, it has laid the groundwork for a national paper documenting the complex nature of the issues involved, the progress achieved and the obstacles still facing Brazilian women. This paper is available here at the special session and on the Internet.

The National Committee worked closely with representatives of civil society with a view to identifying areas where progress has been made and to developing a new agenda on gender issues for Brazil.

I should therefore like to provide a few examples of the successful programmes that have been set up over the past five years: organization of our national human rights programme in 1996, which is closely involved in protecting women's rights; increased attention to combating violence against women, which has involved strengthening the awareness of police precincts on women's issues as well as upgrading shelters for women; improvement in educational indicators, which in Brazil favour girls and women, in literacy, access to schooling, completion of primary school and enrolment in secondary and higher educational institutions; the recent introduction into Brazilian schools of parameters for a national curriculum including a number of topics to be included in the teaching of all traditional subjects with a view to combating all forms of discrimination; the enactment of a women's general health programme to improve the quality of prenatal health services and to reduce the rates of caesarean section deliveries — indeed, a programme to reduce maternal mortality rates, which remain high, was launched only last week at Brasilia; programmes to reduce cervical and breast cancer have come on stream, in response to a recurrent demand of women's organizations; the establishment of new health facilities, both governmental and private, to deal with the growing number of adolescent pregnancies; Government-funded schemes, in partnership with private organizations, to combat sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS; hiring of community health personnel in remote localities to provide prenatal and vaccination services and support for the elderly; the creation of a credit programme, some 32 per cent of whose funds have gone to women; and effective poverty alleviation policies, such as our minimum income programme, which supplements the personal income of senior citizens, the majority of whom are women, and of families with children up to the age of 14 with the requirement that all school-age children regularly attend classes.

Yet we must recognize that many challenges still lie ahead. In fact, despite the significant percentage of women in the work force, their pay still lags behind that of men at all educational levels. In order to overcome discriminatory practices, the Government has encouraged training for the female labour force. To that end, an equal opportunity programme has been introduced in the civil service.

As concerns access to power, progress has been slower. We have, however, adopted important measures, such as election quotas, not to mention the unprecedented appointment of women judges to the higher courts. Women in Brazil have also gained increased access to the media. Their views are increasingly aired and there is growing editorial interest in their particular agenda. They occupy key positions in the media and are distinguished television

news anchors and political and economic commentators, previously an exclusively male domain.

Women account for almost half of all Internet users. The fact that they are at the helm of 25 of the best 100 cybersites in Brazil is suggestive of the new opportunities for self-expression and communication that Brazilian society increasingly offers.

The work of our National Committee has already borne fruit: the Brazilian Government has decided to review the institutional status of the women's rights programme by bringing it directly within the purview of the office of the Minister of Justice. Additionally, the Committee has been entrusted with the task of monitoring public policies as they relate to women's issues.

The world has just passed over the threshold of a new century that is witnessing a revolution wrought by new information technologies and a change in economic paradigms. A new knowledge-based world is emerging and with it new challenges. As these events unfold, women must not be left behind. The international community must continually strive to infuse public policies with a gender-centred perspective that will in fact benefit all segments of society.

Notwithstanding the need to foster the human rights of women, it behoves the international community to identify new themes that will be important for women in the twenty-first century. The recasting of the relationship with men on an equal and equitable footing will enable us to review our work-related conceptions and norms, to redefine the connection between public and private spaces, to re-evaluate those qualities that are narrowly defined as being feminine and to open the way for all to benefit from modern technology. Those are some of the themes of the future.

It has aptly been said the twenty-first century will be the century in which women come into their own. I share that hope, for only thus will we enjoy democracy in all its plenitude. These concepts must not be isolated. An effective policy to foster women's rights is a powerful guarantee that our societies will become more democratic. We are on the right track. It is time for us confidently to prepare for the challenges of the future.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Manel Abeysekera, Chairperson of the National Committee on Women of Sri Lanka.

Mrs. Abeysekera (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka is happy to be participating in this special session of the General Assembly on women, which, perhaps significantly, is the first special session of the new millennium, especially as we have participated in all conferences on this subject for a quarter of a century, since the first in 1975.

Women in Sri Lanka, historically and culturally, have had a role of significance and importance in society, beginning, of course, with the basic unit of society: the family. In fact, our history reveals that we have had a fair gender balance, with Sri Lankan women enjoying a high degree of equality, visibility and decision-making in the home and in society. It would appear that, during our colonial era from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, we came under the influence of the conservatism and puritanism characteristic of European society of the time.

However, since regaining our independence, we have endeavoured to redress the balance. In this context, I am happy to state that the present leadership of Sri Lanka is in the hands of a woman leader, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, who led us into this new millennium, having been re-elected recently for a second consecutive term as President of the Republic, and that Sirimavo R. D. Bandaranaike, Member of Parliament, who is Prime Minister for the third time in her illustrious political career, had the singular distinction of being the world's first woman Prime Minister and head of Government. It was because of this distinction she conferred on women, and the inspiration she gave them, that she was invited by the United Nations to deliver the keynote address to the first United Nations World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, which set in motion the United Nations Decade for Women and the successive world conferences, the fifth of which we are participating in today.

I would like to highlight here some information on the status of women of Sri Lanka to indicate both its positive and negative aspects. Women make up more than half the population. We have a woman as President, a woman as Prime Minister and a woman as Minister of Women's Affairs. Women provide the key financial input into the economy when we consider the

agricultural sector, the plantation sector, the migrant workers' remittances and the garment sector.

Women received the vote in 1931, together with men. Although women are politically conscious, the proportion of women who actively participate in politics is low. Women are poorly represented in Parliament and at provincial and local levels, and therefore there is concern that their issues are inadequately voiced.

Girls, together with boys, have enjoyed free education since 1945. The literacy rate among women over 10 years of age is 89 per cent, and in the population under 45, it is equal to that of men. Girls equal boys in terms of their numbers at the secondary level, reaching 56.1 per cent, and outstrip them at the post-secondary level, where the rate is 21.7 per cent for girls, as against 19.5 per cent for boys. Girls outnumber boys in several university faculties. Yet the unemployment rate for women is 17.5 per cent, as compared with 6.4 per cent for men.

While there are more women than men employed in the health and education services, only one tenth of engineering and technical posts are occupied by women. While our infant mortality rate is quite low, at 17 per 1,000 — a consequence of the State-sponsored free health care that has existed for several decades — we are faced with the problem of underweight babies, which is mainly caused by malnutrition during pregnancy.

Despite far-reaching amendments to our penal code since 1995 so as to include sexual harassment within its ambit, to increase penalties for such crimes as rape and to create women's and children's desks at 37 key police stations, violence against women continues in both the domestic and public spheres.

This picture of gender imbalance is not unique to Sri Lanka and, if we are to advance the status of women, we need to ask ourselves why this is so. If one accepts the principle that all human beings are equal in terms of their rights, one wonders how the unequal bias against women came about. I venture to think that in the early development of humankind sheer physical strength was required for the very existence of human beings battling the elements and other live creatures. Here, man would certainly have scored over woman and become the procurer and the protector, venturing forth and taking initiatives and action to provide food, clothing and shelter, as well as protection, for his own family. In such a scenario, the woman would perhaps have generally remained indoors, fulfilling her biological role of child bearing and child rearing.

However, in the course of time, when living conditions, amenities and facilities improved, it became clear that, although both men and women enjoyed these benefits, they did not necessarily do so on equal terms. Patriarchy had entrenched itself in society and in the minds of men and even of women. History has become "his story" and not hers, too. But when terrible times fell upon humankind, such as world wars, women were called upon to perform tasks and duties outside the home which had been regarded as being within the male sphere, and at the end of those wars they were expected to go back to the confines of the home. This gave rise to the protest movements which found an echo in many countries where women came forward to agitate on issues that concerned them, not merely on gender discrimination, but also on national issues such as, in our part of the world, the elimination of colonialism.

Thus it is not surprising that the cause of women's equality — women make up more than half of the population of States — became a concern of the United Nations, which we must thank for keeping it in focus for over a quarter of a century.

What we need to ask ourselves is: how far has this focus resulted in eliminating discrimination against women, and how far have we come as we meet together at this forum dedicated to the cause of women? We have to admit that the path we have trodden has not been easy: it has been uphill and beset with many obstacles. We have advanced — yet, perhaps, not far enough.

The question then arises as to what more we should do to achieve gender equality and equity. There are many things we can and should do. In the short time allocated to me, I would like to share with the Assembly a few thoughts in this regard. If we want to achieve anything for society, we must be prepared to accept what we are trying to achieve and change our attitude so as to bring it about. In other words, change can come through the minds of human beings, thoughts and ideas giving rise to positive action. This must start with the individual man and woman, then reach out into the community, the nation and, finally, the whole international community.

We must accept women's equality and equity as a human right. We cannot accept any group of persons — and certainly not half the population of the world — being marginalized in terms of their rights.

Sri Lanka prides itself on being a democracy, and our constitution enshrines the principle of equality and non-discrimination. If women are to be equal, a sharing role for both men and women is implied, whether in the home or outside it, both making policy decisions as well as benefiting from them in all spheres of activity, from the socio-economic to the political and to peacemaking, conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Gender equality and balance cannot be promoted piecemeal. They must be approached holistically, through gender mainstreaming in every sphere of life.

All of our States need our people to work towards a better life for us all. Can we do that without the involvement of half our population — our women — and without harnessing their talents, capacity and capabilities? Can we have true development, which must be for humankind, without involving half of it? Perhaps the reason for our not having progressed in development as much as we should have is that, by and large, we have not involved women in the process. Research has established that societies which have developed are those in which the status of women is advanced.

Women must be permitted to do what they wish to attempt to do in terms of activity outside the home. They must do so voluntarily; there should be no stereotype for women, whether as wives and mothers — a vital and highly respected role — or as working women and career women who combine both roles. What needs to be removed are the barriers confining women to the home and those preventing them from advancing to a position of equality with men both within and outside the home. We need to have policies and mechanisms to achieve gender mainstreaming and gender balance, but no amount of contrivances are going to help the process if they lack the moving spirit of sincerity, with — as the documentation for this session stresses — men supporting women in the task.

I believe that, even if all the mechanisms recommended are put in place, we will not advance the cause of women if we — men, especially, but women, too — are not sincere or convinced. The advancement of women starts with the recognition by women themselves of their self-worth and their potential. Women must not be regarded as inferiors, to be battered or treated as sex objects or merchandise, and women must not accept such treatment: they must think positive and act positive.

Violence in whatever form is unacceptable in civilized society. The victims of violence are often women and children. Violence — from domestic violence to terrorism and armed conflict — has been a major deterrent to the advancement and empowerment of women. The ugly situation of terrorism prevails in Sri Lanka today, and concern about it has prevented our women leaders from being present at this session. It is incumbent on all of us — men, women and the international community in general — to eradicate the scourge of all forms of violence from the face of the earth, not only for the sake of the advancement of women but also for the dignity and worth of all human beings.

Women must discuss all issues confronting them, not only with women — the convinced and the converted, as is often the case — but also with men, who must assist in the process of gender mainstreaming. The day we stop talking about women's issues will be the day of gender equality and equity. Let us therefore, at this special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", rededicate ourselves to sincerity of effort in a cause that simply cannot be ignored if humanity is to progress, and accept a new paradigm of shared male and female styles of leadership, responsibility and action for the good of us all.

Sri Lanka ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as far back as 1981. We in Sri Lanka will continue to work for the advancement of women while maintaining our cultural and religious heritage of valuing the family, which is the microcosm and nucleus of a society in which gender balance can go a long way towards achieving gender equality and equity, resulting in a healthy and happy nation.

We are committed to the Beijing Platform for Action, based on which we have a National Plan of Action for 2001-2005. At the end of that period we hope that, as the Political Declaration submitted to this Conference envisages, there will be a review of national and international action. We hope that the

outcome document and other documents of this session will give us further material and ideas for achieving our common goal. I wish our deliberations at this session success, and hope that all of us will be able to take away from it much inspiration and new initiatives on how we may further the cause of gender equality and equity. For without it, I do not think we can have true development and peace in the twenty-first century, which is our tripartite goal, as the theme of our session indicates.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.